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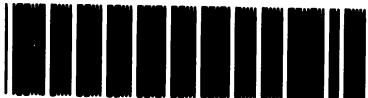
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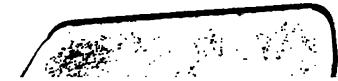
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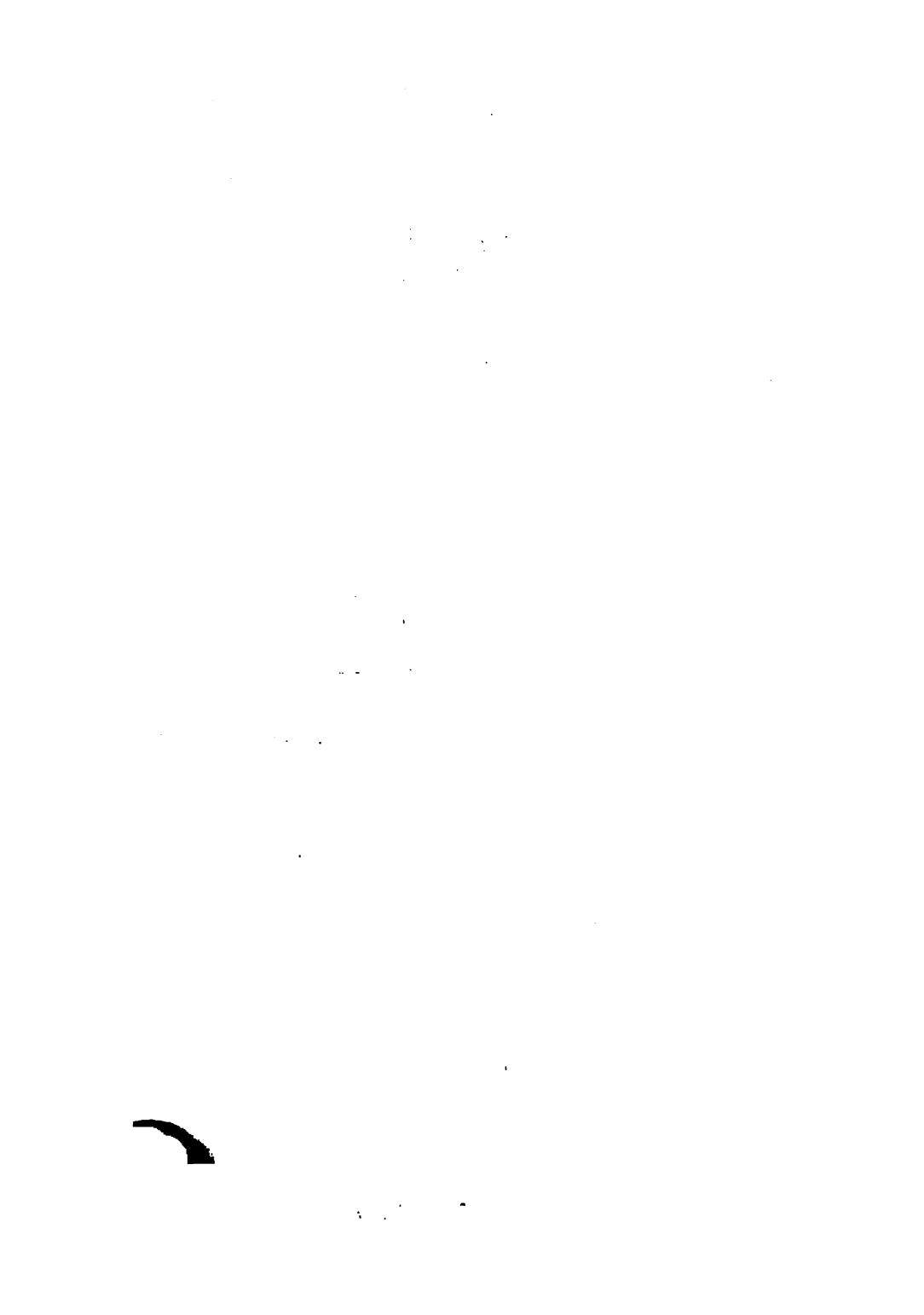


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A LONDON SEASON.

By ANNIE THOMAS,

(*MRS. PENDER CUDLIP.*)

AUTHOR OF "DENNIS DONNE," "SIR VICTOR'S CHOICE,"
"STRAY SHEEP," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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A LONDON SEASON.

CHAPTER I.

MISS GARWOOD VICTRIX.

“THE refined and musical circle” (see advertisement in all the daily papers) of ladies and gentlemen who are received and entertained on highly remunerative terms by Mrs. Withers, in her hospitable and handsome home, are awaiting impatiently the announcement of dinner and the advent of a stranger, when first we meet them.

Mrs. Withers is the daughter of a naval

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and the widow of an army officer, facts which are kept well before the minds of the several members of the aforesaid refined and musical circle. For among her many other excellent qualities, Mrs. Withers has this one of never forgetting anything that redounds to her own credit. “Her dear papa” has been dragged from his watery grave afresh for the benefit of every new-comer. And if her lamented husband was half as much fatigued by the performance of the numerous deeds of valour which she ascribes to him, as her ‘circle’ is by her recital of them, it is no wonder that he died of sheer exhaustion many a year ago.

She is a plump and comely dame of unblemished respectability, and unsurpassable powers of management. Nothing is ever cold, hurried, late, or otherwise

disorderly, in her establishment. The elderly gentlemen and middle-aged ladies who reside with her, on what she calls "terms of mutual accommodation," have little or nothing to find fault with; that for which they have bargained, they have. She gives them their pound of flesh, and does it with so much hospitable grace that they almost forget that they pay her handsomely for it at times.

Her circle is without reproach, and above suspicion. The elderly gentlemen are colonels and majors, with their names in the army-list; members of good clubs, or, if not members themselves on terms, of intimacy with men who are. They do not as a rule mingle freely with fashion's gay throng; but they make it to be clearly understood that they could do so if they wished. The sole exception to the military rule

is Mr. Powell ; and he is a brilliant exception, one of whom any hostess in the position of Mrs. Withers may well be proud ; for he has a 'place' in the country, and his sister is the Marchioness of Claymore, "a good old Scotch title, which strikes awe to the stoutest hearts over the border," Mr. Powell affirms.

It is only for three months in the season that Mr. Powell honours and elevates the circle at 10, Darlington Crescent, by making one of its links. "Our friend, the Marchioness's brother, will soon be with us again," Mrs. Withers is in the habit of saying in her most languid tones and with her sweetest smile, about the end of April, and the others stir themselves up at the tidings, and begin to read the *Court Circular* with eager interest, and to zealously look up every bit of intelligence the weekly journals

may be good enough to give about the Claymores and other members of the aristocracy.

He has been with them for a fortnight now, and his frequent allusions to "what the Queen said to his sister the other day," and his deep regret that "Claymore had not been able to go to Hurlingham with the Prince on Friday, as the latter had made up his mind he (Claymore) should do," imparts quite an aristocratic bouquet to the atmosphere. Personally he is not imposing, being low in stature and lean in habit. But these facts are not clearly discerned by those around him here, for the halo of his sister's rank is about him, glorifying and beautifying him exceedingly. In manner he is what those about him make him—insufferably haughty whenever he is not insolently condescending; but

withal intensely popular with the majority, who pronounce him to be "so extremely aristocratic, quite an ornament to the circle!" in loving remembrance of his sister the Marchioness.

"I ought to have told you that we are expecting an addition to our party to-night," Mrs. Withers says to him softly as she sees that he is looking at his watch. She always speaks softly to him as if he were made of fine porcelain, and might break if roughly jarred by tones with reality in them.

"Indeed!" he says, adjusting his eye-glass, without betraying a shadow of interest in either tone or look. To him Mrs. Withers' remark is not nearly as exciting in its nature and import as one made by his cook, to the effect "that she had engaged a new scullery-maid," would

be. “These people” about him here, though as well-born and better bred than himself, hardly exist for the man whose whole nature is leavened and defiled by his self-glorification. He esteems himself more highly for being the brother-in-law of the Marquis of Claymore, than that nobleman esteems himself, his race, his title, and everything else that he possesses.

“I believe the title was given to my people some centuries ago, in order that that miserable little brother of yours might make an ass of himself about us in these degenerate modern days,” Lord Claymore says to his wife sometimes, and her ladyship laughs and replies,

“He’s so infinitely small, my dear, that he can’t take a good generous pleasure, even in that. I am good for him to talk about; but he can’t forgive me for having

married you, whereas he has never succeeded in getting a decent-looking girl of our own class to look at him, much less to marry him."

"A very charming addition too, I think we shall find her," Mrs. Withers goes on; "she has written some books, which are, I'm told, very clever indeed, and she writes some of those scathing articles on society, in some of the weekly journals; she will be quite an acquisition, I think."

Mrs. Withers speaks quite timidly, and her deprecating manner meets with its due and just reward.

"I hope to Heaven the woman won't bore us at dinner with any of her literary jargon," Mr. Powell says in those flat metallic tones which have about as much warmth and feeling in them as a toad has. "Numbers of women who come from Heaven-

knows-where, and live the devil-knows-how, have the impertinence in these days to call themselves novelists and journalists, and to write about society ; why, they never even come in contact with us. I have said to my sister (the Marchioness of Claymore) frequently that I am very glad she has not been infected by the debasing spirit of the times, and filled her drawing-room with a set of people who write and paint, and dance on the tight-ropes and mouth Shakespeare.”

“ But, you *don’t* class writers with—with tight-rope dancers, do you ? ” Mrs. Withers asks in agony.

“ My dear madam, certainly I do ! their trades differ, I allow, as the butcher’s from the baker’s, and so on ; but in classifying a people, I should put all so-called artists down together. They assume to belong to some-

thing superior to the labouring population, and they decidedly do not belong to us, therefore I give them a wide platform all to themselves, and I wish, with all my heart, that they would remain on it.” And Mr. Powell, who can write, but not legibly, and cannot spell at all, turns with languidly-portrayed disgust from the subject.

Presently a portly little page opens the door, and announces “Miss Garwood” and “dinner” simultaneously, and the new member of the circle divides the honours of interest and attention with the eagerly anticipated meal.

She is a tall young woman, ungracefully built, and badly dressed, with a look of power in her broad brow and dark grey steady eyes, that is contradicted by the weakly-sloping chin and feebly sensuous mouth. Short-waisted and long-limbed, one sees at a

glance that if she managed and draped herself properly, the *tout ensemble* of her figure would be classical. As it is, it is clumsy; for in spite of all the visible conceit which sits enthroned on her brow, and plays over the lips that are now pursed up with pretentious demureness, she has not attained the art of holding her hands, and moving her feet as if she could defy observation.

Two or three of the elderly gentlemen mutter to one another that "she's a mighty fine girl," and the ladies murmur that she "looks uncommonly clever." But Mr. Powell glances at her superciliously, and she, having acute powers of observation, notices the glance, and attributes it to its right source.

"He's the chief one here, and I'll get hold of him before this night is over," she says to herself, and all the while she goes on

talking in a well-sustained voice about some of her experiences in the north of England, in which district she has been recently staying.

By-and-by Mr. Powell finds himself listening to her, unwillingly enough, for she is concentrating all the attention on herself, and not one of them is waiting, as usual, with a fawning smile of expectancy for his next platitude. Miss Garwood is telling the story of how the miners in a colliery, belonging to the friend with whom she has been staying, struck during her visit, and how a powerful address from her pen, read as if coming from his heart by their employer, had softened their hardened hearts, and reduced them to order.

Her words run trippingly off her tongue ; her phrases flow fluently. Now and again she gets among sunken rocks and seems

likely to founder, but she tacks and steers away into safety and smooth waters, almost immediately. "I had the subject at my finger's ends," she says, "and I said to him 'you leave it to me, and I'll write you something that will prove to them that, in the war of capital against labour, capital must eventually be the conqueror ;' he told me afterwards that he wondered where I got it all, for he had been studying the subject all his life, and found that he knew little about it compared to me."

"He must have been a very stupid man," a keen-eyed lady, with an inquisitive nose, puts in volubly ; "a man to be a coal-mine owner and an employer all his life, as you say, and to know less of the subject than you who have had no experience of the work or the workers!—he must be very stupid indeed!"

“He was just that,” Miss Garwood says, nodding her head assentingly, and sacrificing her friend’s intellect on the spot; “a child might have managed them, but if I hadn’t been there to tell him what to say, they’d have been in insubordination up to this day.” She looks round as if challenging argumentative opposition to this incontrovertible fact, and she gets it in a way she scarcely expects.

“Oh! you *told* him what to say,” the keen-eyed lady, Mrs. Varney, says. (Mrs. Varney has hitherto been the accepted *belle esprit* and universal literary authority in Mrs. Withers’ select circle. “No! I have not published!” she says, when questioned injudiciously on the subject. “No, I have not published; I leave that to those who are ambitious of gaining empty fame, but I have written volumes.”)

“ Oh ! you *told* him what to say, did you ? ” she says, now bearing down so unexpectedly upon Miss Garwood that the latter is shaken on the pedestal she has placed herself upon for an instant.

“ Yes, I told him,—that is, I just stood by and prompted him ; I had read up the subject and knew more about it from reading than he did with all his experience.”

“ I thought you said that you *wrote* the speech for him, and that he got it off by heart,” the keen-eyed lady persists ; and as she speaks she glances triumphantly round the circle, as though she were calling upon them to regard and admire her powers of cross-examination. Hitherto when she has pitted herself verbally against any one, that one has been looked upon as doomed. But the day of her destiny is over now ! No one is seen to rejoice that she has cornered Miss Gar-

wood for an instant, and when that astute young lady says calmly,

“ Well, and is not writing a speech for a man to make, telling him what to say ? ” two or three of the elderly military gentlemen express relief and approbation.

“ Quite right ! Very good ! Perfectly true ! ” they say, and Miss Garwood goes on with her dinner with the serene feeling of satisfaction in having frustrated the politics of her first feminine opponent in that house, and with the confident belief that she will be the cynosure of all the elderly gentlemen’s eyes from this moment, till “ it is convenient for her to take the opportunity of leaving Mrs. Withers’ select circles.”

“ Can you tell us anything about her ? One likes to know who and what people are when they dwell in the tents with one ? ” Mrs. Varney says sharply to Mrs. Withers

later on in the evening. Miss Garwood at the moment is occupied in telling an anecdote, with a good deal of local colouring and some warmth about it, to the old colonels and majors, and they are laughing, and choking, and chuckling over it, in a way that speaks volumes for the neatness and piquancy with which it has been told. They feel quite young and gay, debonair and pleasantly wicked, as they listen to her. “By jove!” they say to themselves and one another, “she’s a wonderfully clever woman! a woman with a head! and a grand *physique*.” And in return for their evident admiration of her, she tells them that she “can’t stand talking to young men! no man under *middle-age* has the power of drawing a word from her.” When she says this, the elderly gentlemen hardly feel forty! they stand erect, and banish after-dinner torpor, and one of them

who is getting rather stout, or rather whose “ coat has shrunk ” (he says) “ till it has become too tight for him,” resolves to take “ emaceration powders,” which he sees advertised as being at once safe and certain.

“ Tell you anything about her, Mrs. Varney ! Why, I *have* told you a great deal, I think ; she is a young Scotch lady, I believe, quite independent, not obliged to write for money at *all* ; and she and her family are very particular about what acquaintances she makes ; I assure you, Mrs. Pellew, the lady who introduced her here made countless inquiries before she would permit her to come.”

“ Oh ! indeed, *we* were canvassed, were we ? *our* respectability was questioned in order that that of Miss Garwood might be preserved intact, was it ? ” Mrs. Varney, interrupts, bridling and shaking her head,

and generally deporting herself as one who longs to do battle on her own behalf against all comers.

“Not at all, not at all,” the harassed hostess replies. “I only mentioned that Mrs. Pellew had been so *very* particular, in order to convince you that Miss Garwood is a most unexceptionable person; then her writing makes her quite a person of distinction, you see?”

“I don’t see it at all,” Mrs. Varney nippingly replies, thinking of those unpublished tomes of hers; “many people write, and write in a way, too, that calls forth commendation from great literary authorities, but they have not the vanity or the audacity to publish; I have been implored by my friends to bring out many of my works, when I have allowed them to see the manuscript; they all tell me they cannot have a greater

treat than to read some of my chapters which are studded with *bon mots*, and overflowing with wit and humour. But I have one answer for them all, “ If Captain Varney had lived, he would never have permitted my name to appear in print with the Charlotte Brontës and Miss Braddons, and Broughtons and George Eliots. He was a very proud man ! I may have told you that he was of the old Derbyshire Varney family, and that it is said that King Henry the Eighth—”

“ Yes, you have told me,” distraught Mrs. Withers (who has heard the story a hundred times before) interposes. “ And I have no doubt but that Captain Varney was quite right ; still, everybody has not the same prejudices, you must remember, and I’m sure I don’t see why publishing a book is so much more degrading a thing than

writing it. I did hope that Miss Garwood and you, having kindred tastes, would have got on well together. It would be such a great thing for her." Mrs. Withers goes on judiciously, " You being one of my oldest established guests, and having such a *delightful* circle of friends in London, I quite looked forward to your introducing her about, and making it pleasant and lively for her."

" Oh ! probably my friends are not intellectual enough for her, or sufficiently aristocratic for her friends to approve of," Mrs. Varney says. But she is softened by the compliment, and as Miss Garwood appears to be making head-way with every one, Mr. Powell included, she (Mrs. Varney) resolves to form an alliance with her, for a time at least.

Greatly to his own amazement, before this first evening is over, Mr. Powell finds him-

self holding friendly converse with the stranger. He imagines that he is flattering and patronising her! She knows perfectly well that in reality she is turning his weak old head with her clever, but withal coarse compliments.

In common with most weak men, who have never mastered the art of being lucid and interesting in prose, Mr. Powell fancies that he has a pretty taste for poetry. In the course of a conversation (which she inaugurates) on the beauties of the sylvan scenes in the midst of which his place is situated, he quotes a few lame lines on the subject, which she shrewdly divines he has himself written. Miss Garwood has a little art, and a good deal of artifice at command, and she brings both to bear upon the unavowed bard on the spot.

“That’s good!” she says with an air of



sincere, though suppressed appreciation ; “ do you know I’ve never happened to meet with that, and I thought I knew all modern English, and nearly the whole of the American poetry by heart, but I never happened to meet with that.”

She looks up at him with such honest, admiring eyes that the proud and happy poet falls headlong into the snare, and proceeds to recite a few more words that totter into rhymes at irregular intervals.

“ You must tell me where I can get a copy of them,” she says, growing more earnest as the gratified author brings another verse to a faltering conclusion ; “ they have a ring about them that I don’t quite recognise ; the word-painting in those lines,

“ Green leaves flapping like fans in the wind,
Buttercups gilding the grass you will find,”

is almost Tennysonian — *almost*, but not quite.”

“ You are quite right,” Mr. Powell says affably ; “ Tennyson was *not* the model I set before myself when I commenced that poem, I should scorn to be a mere imitator, but Browning—”

“ Ah ! it’s Browning, to be sure, that they remind me of,” she says unblushingly, “ that’s what I felt they were, stronger—they have more grit in them than Tennyson ; will you tell me where I can get them, or will you give me a copy ?”

“ I will—with the author’s warmest thanks for the delicate and critical appreciation you have bestowed upon them,” Mr. Powell says, bowing with gorgeous complacency. And when he says that, Miss Garwood knows that she has caught and conquered her man.

“ I’ll not try to thank you, Mr. Powell, for the pleasure you have given me, but I’ll

tell you this—I know what real poetry is; it's given into me that I write the best criticisms on poetry that the "*Glasgow Examiner*" and '*Stafford Independent*' have ever had. I've made a study of it, and I'll tell you this, that anyone, any publisher, would be glad to give you something handsome for a volume of such poetry as that! Why don't you bring it out? I'll get you early notices in all the leading papers; now just say, — will you? You'd make something worth having by them!"

"Does the woman think that I have the trading spirit, and would sell my muse," Mr. Powell says to himself. But flesh is weak, more especially bard's flesh. And he is, notwithstanding his silent commentary on it, much impressed both with the advice and the adviser.

“ I have had them printed, not published, you understand, for private circulation only among my own immediate friends ; if I may find you here to-morrow morning, I shall do myself the honour of presenting you with a copy. They are dedicated to my sister, the Marchioness of Claymore.”

“ Is the Marchioness of Claymore a sister of yours ? ” Miss Garwood asks with undisguised amazement, cracks showing in her thin coating of the varnish of good breeding at once.

“ She is ! ” he says a little stiffly, struggling to retain his position of social Samson against this astounding Dalilah.

“ I’ve heard a good deal about them ; my aunt, Miss McTurnan, stays away often up in the Highlands, with a friend near their place.”

“ I know all their neighbours up in the



Highlands; will you tell me the name of your—aunt's friend?"

"I forget at this moment," Miss Garwood says carelessly. "I'm hearing so many new names every day of my life now I've come up to London and everybody is wanting to be introduced to me, that I'm forgetting the old ones."

"I don't wonder at 'every one,' wanting to be introduced to you," Mr. Powell says gallantly, as she, feeling she has done a good day's work and fairly earned a night's repose, rises to say good night. "It is natural that the many should desire to know you, but keep your friendship for the few," he adds in the nearest approach to an impassioned whisper that he has ever achieved in his life.

"They'll talk me over sooner or later, so they may as well get it all over among

themselves to-night, before they know much about me," Miss Garwood says to herself with a yawn, as soon as she is in the safe seclusion of her own room. "The women will all be ready to cut my throat in a few days, and that Mrs. Varney will do me all the harm she can, with that sharp tongue of hers, till I cut the tip of it. The old boy and his verses are a rare joke; I wonder can I get him to introduce me to his sister the marchioness, and make her take me out; I'll find out all I can about them at once; it doesn't do to make mistakes with that sort."

Having come to this conclusion, Miss Garwood sits down and writes a long letter to the maiden lady away in bonnie Scotland, whose well-sounding name, and proclaimed austerity and exclusiveness, have been of incalculable service to her niece,

during the latter's progress through the world in which she is winning her way. The early portion of this letter deals with a period anterior to this evening, but the latter paragraphs are interesting and instructive.

“ I am now settled down to my work, in the house of a lady of distinction to whom I have been introduced by Mrs. Pellew. She is a Mrs. Withers, a commonplace kind of woman, but evidently knowing first-rate people. Among her visitors to-night was a Mr. Powell, a man of splendid family and position, with a grand place in the country. His sister is the Marchioness of Claymore. Didn't you hear queer stories about Lord Claymore when you went up to Glenfallan last year? if you did, let me know them; they may be useful, and anyway it looks well to know something of such people as

the Claymores. Mr. Powell is as taken with me as he can be ; he has given me a volume of his poems, and I've flattered the old gentleman about them so well that he'll introduce me to the marchioness, his sister, and she'll take me to Court and into the best set. Tell them all at home this, and let them die of spleen at my having got on so well. I don't understand any one being envious and jealous, because another is better looking and cleverer. Mrs. Pellew has been very kind and useful ; it's through her I've got in to this capital set, in fact. But I don't want to see much more of her now. She'll hang on to me, and hinder me if I don't keep her at arms' length. Don't forget to give me all you can get hold of about the Claymores. I've told old Powell that you stay with some people who know them, and he was down upon me for



their names at once : shall I tell him they're the Inchquins ? or is Glenfallan a place to be kept dark in the Claymore set ? I am wanting some new dresses, but till my next quarter's salary from the journals I'm writing for is due, I'll have to go without them, unless you will send me twenty pounds ! It will be impossible for me to go to the marchioness's till I've set myself up at a London dress-makers. My publisher tells me that my next novel, if I carry it on as I've begun it, will bring the world to my feet.

“Your affectionate niece,

“LILY GARWOOD.”

It will be seen from these few passages that Miss Garwood either assumed a great deal or was gifted with the rare Scotch gift of second-sight ! And it will be further seen that she did not hesitate to paint the

lily whenever she thought that a few skilful touches would improve that pure and simple flower. Miss McTurnan, reading this letter by-and-by in her substantial, comfortable Scottish home, in a pretty little village about five miles from Edinburgh, will feel her maidenly aunt's heart expand with hope and pride at the prospects deftly limned forth by her niece. The dear old lady will not be quite sure whether, in due course of time, this brother of a marchioness will not develope into a marquis himself; and feeling that it will be a grand thing to have our Lily in the Peerage, that twenty pounds will come!

CHAPTER II.

BETWEEN TWO STOOLS.

TRIM, brisk, scrupulously neat and well-dressed, Mrs. Varney is always a great and pleasant feature at the breakfast-table. The little lady is quite an authority on the war and politics, and the other ladies find it much easier to get up the facts concerning them, which will enable them to look as if they knew a little about what is going on generally, from her light and airy conversation than from the long reports and leading articles. The majority of the newspapers which lie upon the breakfast-table are

addressed to **Mrs. Varney**, and she is magnificent both in lending and reading aloud from them.

But this morning, though she is no less trim, neat, and scrupulously well-dressed than usual, she is not by any means brisk or conversational. On the contrary, she is decidedly depressed and silent. She broods over her papers, and takes no part in the discussion that is being carried on between Colonel Wakefield and **Mrs. Withers**, as to whether it is really well that a young person in Miss Garwood's position should be so lifted out of her sphere as to be taken to the **Marchioness of Claymore's**. "It is certain she could not go unless she had been asked, and as she *is* young, it is certain that the marchioness must have asked her," **Mrs. Withers** (who is very loyal to her boarders so long as they stay with her) says doggedly.

“Yes! but *how* has she been asked?” Colonel Wakefield asks. The gallant officer has been fighting the ground inch by inch around Miss Garwood against Mr. Powell for the last fortnight, and now that gentleman has fairly or unfairly worsted him, and got him on the hip by getting the Marchioness of Claymore to invite Miss Garwood to one of her Saturday afternoons.

“*How* has she been asked?” he repeats with a reddening face, as he reflects on how cruelly and curtly a scheme, that he has projected for the fair Lily’s amusement this afternoon, has been thrown over by the invitation. “Miss Lily Garwood is not a young lady to hide her light under a bushel; if Lady Claymore had sent her a note or a card of invitation, we should have seen it! Even if she had not pointedly

shown it to us, she would have left it all over the house for us to see ; no ! the fact of the matter is that she has got it through that conceited old ass, Powell ; and he has only done it to establish a claim on her gratitude, and make her fancy that he'll gain still further social favours for her ; what do you say, Mrs. Varney ? ”

That lady, thus appealed to, is compelled to break through her own lines of reserve. Dragged into speech on the subject, she resolves to make her words as damaging to Miss Garwood as may be, for Mr. Powell is a free man, and she (Mrs. Varney) is a free woman ; and who can tell what might have been, had not this young Scotchwoman and her wiles intervened ! So now she says in her most incisive tones,

“ I think Miss Garwood quite capable of inviting herself anywhere, and from what

I know of Mr. Powell, I should say he had nothing whatever to do with it ; as to his wanting to establish a claim on her gratitude, you must be blind indeed not to see how glad he would be to shake her off. There *are others* who might have monopolised him *much* more, and gained an introduction to his sister the marchioness, if they had been equally pushing, and equally vain and thick-skinned."

"Nonsense ! any one can see that the old fellow has lost his head to the girl," Colonel Wakefield says angrily. He follows her like her shadow, and bores her out of her mind."

"Has she told *you* that?" Mrs. Varney asks sneeringly.

"Well ! she has not exactly told me, but any one can see it with half an eye, and she herself admitted it to me ; besides is it

natural that a fine handsome girl like that can tolerate an old whipper-snapper like Powell?"

"She flatters him about his poetry till he thinks himself a second Browning—only better; and she has got hold of every little rubbishing historical fact concerning the family of Claymore that all the old gossips in Scotland can supply her with," Mrs. Varney says quickly.

"You have frequently asked him to read his garbage to you," Colonel Wakefield says wrathfully. "A woman is obliged to be complaisant when a man is such an egregious ass as to force her to listen to his ravings. Powell writing poetry! Great powers! there's more music in the bray of an ass than in all his verse, I'll venture to say."

"It's so reasonable of you, so just and manlike, to disparage him and abuse his

works because a woman makes herself ridiculous by her intense and strained admiration of him and them,” Mrs. Varney says bitterly; “I think the way in which she lays herself out to please him is deplorable, quite deplorable! If I were her mother—I mean her eldest sister—I should feel myself called upon to remonstrate with her; as it is—”

Mrs. Varney is compelled to bring her sketch of what her course of conduct would be under different circumstances to an abrupt close, in consequence of the appearance in the doorway of Miss Garwood herself.

“ You are late this morning, my dear; I hope you rested well ? ” Mrs. Withers says good temperedly. If Miss Garwood stayed up half the night, and laid in bed all the day, and demanded a constant succession of meals daintily served, Mrs. Withers would still feel amiably towards her at this juncture.

It seems to Mrs. Withers that her young lady boarder is on the high-road to splendid promotion. This invitation to his sister's, the marchioness, is almost equivalent to a declaration of honourable intentions.

“Yes, I slept well, thank you, but I’m late, I know, because it takes me so long to dress,” she says lazily; and Mrs. Varney, looking at the authoress’s cuffless wrists and untidily arranged hair, remarks,

“Does it really! I should hardly have thought that.”

It is an unhappy speech; for neat, trim, scrupulously well-dressed as Mrs. Varney is, she is not impregnable. All her teeth and nearly the whole of her hair are false, whereas Miss Garwood’s locks, though they may be untidily arranged, are all her own, and have that unmistakable stamp of reality which locks which have been just previously

dipped into a basin of cold water invariably possess. There is not an atom of make-up about Miss Garwood, so on the whole she is justified in saying,

“ Well, you see, I don’t put my hair on ready done ; that stage of my toilet takes a longer time to get over than yours, I fancy. Colonel Wakefield, will you look over and correct a bit of military writing for me this morning ? I want to march one regiment out of a garrison town and another into it, and I never do anything of that sort in my novels without getting some authority to verify my descriptions ; that’s why my books are so immensely popular and successful ! ” she adds, looking round the table as if she thought it only kind to offer them some sort of explanation as to the secret of her success.

“ I shall be *only* too happy ; ” the warrior says beamingly, feeling that henceforth he

will be associated with Miss Garwood's literary triumphs.

“It's very kind of you to tell us that they are so immensely popular and successful,” Mrs. Varney says, leaning forward, and shouting her words out as if they were venomous darts. “One likes to hear of something that one can read, and it's quite good of you to mention yours, because we had none of us ever heard of them before you came; I am sure you will forgive us, won't you?” she adds sweetly, but her eyes are dancing with fiery triumph.

Miss Garwood laughs a clear, unrestrained resonant laugh.

“Oh! I'll forgive you readily enough for proclaiming that you take no interest in what's going on about you; I suppose you live in the past, Mrs. Varney; very likely I'll do the same when I am old.”

She is so perfectly cool and in earnest that no one can imagine for a moment that she means to be insulting. Nevertheless, Mrs. Varney feels insulted, and unadvisedly shows that she does so, by rising and leaving the room in an embarrassingly visible huff.

“Are we to carry out our plan of visiting the Royal Academy this afternoon?” Colonel Wakefield asks. “You were mentioning that you must go on account of that notice you have to send off to Glasgow for Monday’s paper?”

She calmly bites a bit of toast, and gazes at him with steady eyes full of truth and thought, as she eats. Having done this and gained time, she answers him.

“I made a mistake and mixed up my papers when we were talking about the notices yesterday; it’s the Glasgow paper that I have done already, and the Stafford

critique needn't go off till the middle of next week. And that's fortunate for me," she adds ingenuously, "for I am obliged to go to a reception at the Marchioness of Claymore's this afternoon."

Her large truthful-looking eyes say as plainly as possible, "I wish you were going with me," but he is too much hurt at the overthrow of his scheme for the afternoon, to be softened by their mute eloquence. All he can trust himself to say is,

"Oh ! indeed ; I hope then, as that is the case, that Mr. Powell has succeeded in inducing his noble relatives to take a little notice of him ; they give him the cold shoulder, and a wide berth, generally speaking."

"Yes, he's a rare joke," she says, surrendering her absent friend with a celerity that is rather bewildering ; "he and his poetry, and

his sister the Marchioness ! I get more laughs out of him than out of any one I know."

"Then now, as you have finished breakfast, let us go and look over the military episode," Colonel Wakefield says, rising with youthful vigour on the ruins of his friend Powell, and desirous of showing Mrs. Withers (who will be sure to tell Mrs. Varney) that his supremacy over the mind and heart and taste of the clever and versatile Miss Garwood is still undisturbed, although Mr. Powell has been guilty of bribery and corruption by introducing her to the Marchioness of Claymore.

Miss Garwood makes no rejoinder to his remark ; nor does she rise with corresponding youthful vigour when he suggests that together they shall go and "look over and correct the military episode." Nor will

it be marvelled at, that sloth and inertia should seize her for their own, when it is confessed that not only has she not yet written the gaily alluded-to martial incident, but that she has no design whatever of doing so at all. Accordingly now she takes out a letter from her aunt, Miss McTurnan, and as she reads she rallies her thoughts, and brings them into good marching order against Colonel Wakefield's plans of happiness.

“Isn't this unfortunate,” she says, appealing to him for sympathy, with a frank air of trouble that touches him intensely; “just when I'd settled to have a quiet morning's work with you (and the good you'd have done me no one knows better than myself), here comes this letter from my aunt, Miss McTurnan, upsetting everything; she wants me to go right off into town shopping for her, getting her things that she

could get just as well in Edinburgh, and I'll have to do it."

Colonel Wakefield is crushed into feeling considerably more than forty. But he hears Powell's hated step in the passage, and knows he has but a moment.

"Let me go with you—be your escort," he says hastily, and she *is* so sorry to be obliged to negative his daring proposition almost in the face of his enemy.

"Hush ! no, not to be thought of," she says hurriedly ; "how d'ye do, Mr. Powell. I was just wanting to see you before I go off up town shopping for my aunt, Miss McTurnan, who wants some presents sent over for Inchquin of Glenfallan. You may have heard the marchioness speak of the Inchquins ; they know her."

"So does her groom," he would have said only the other day, but he is mellowed now ;

and she knows pretty well how far she may go, and what she may venture to say to him.

“I shall not permit you to go off shopping,” he says gaily. “I want to read my new poem to you, and you must give *me* the morning.”

She has a difficult part to play, for Colonel Wakefield is within earshot; and if she stays at home to hear the out-pourings of Mr. Powell’s muse, when she has declined to stay at home to have her unwritten military episode corrected by the gallant son of Mars, she may find herself in the proverbial position of those who waver between two stools. Her part is very difficult, therefore, for Mr. Powell is awaiting her answer with a beaming air of expectation, and Colonel Wakefield with a scowling look of discontent. “These old men are too tiresome!” she says

to herself as she stands biting her lips and looking gravely into space, “I *must* hear that poem through, or I may lose the mar-chioness, and that’s not to be thought of for the sake of pleasing that old military image, who’ll dangle after every woman, and never do any real good for one.” This is what she thinks ! What she says, is,

“ Hearing your poem will be business, Mr. Powell, for I have to write a London letter for a country newspaper every week, and I’m always glad to get hold of anything new ; my aunt, Miss McTurnan, won’t mind her shopping being put off in such a cause ; she always says to me, ‘Never let any pleasure stand in the way of your profes-sional business.’ ”

“ Yet you allowed her shopping to stand in the way of giving me the great pleasure of putting my poor services at your disposal

this morning," Colonel Wakefield says tremulously, and no child of ten years old could look more engagingly ingenuous than Miss Garwood as she replies,

"Ah! now shall I tell you the truth? It's so crudely written that I am afraid to submit it to you till I have corrected it, even by my own poor lights; when I've done that you shall see it, and put the final polish on it."

She says all this with an air of serious, sober earnest that completely takes in her two auditors and partially takes in herself.

"I am real clever," she says to herself; among other strongly marked peculiarities she has this one of adopting and adapting any accent or provincialism she has ever heard, for her own use and service. She applies them with so much skill and talent

that they merely seem piquant and original when issuing from her lips—never vulgar!

“I am real clever,” she now says, ruthlessly using up the favourite phrase of an American lady, whom she met only last night; “both of these old gentlemen believe in me almost as much as I believe in myself, and *that’s* no small work to have accomplished in a short space of time.”

As she is thinking thus, the colonel is ardently pleading his cause, and fancying that she is impressed by his eloquence.

“I would save you *all* trouble, Miss Garwood, if you would only permit me; let me do the rough corrections as well as the final polishing? And let us do it this morning? Your time is of value, *your* place is on Parnassus, and no one must hinder you on your way up. I am sure Mr. Powell will not be selfish enough to make his poem an

obstruction ; that can be heard at any time, but this work which you have in hand must not be kept from the public a day longer than is necessary ; do let me urge you to do your own work this morning ? ”

“ Pray do not let me be an obstruction,” Mr. Powell says, his slightly bleared old eyes searching the fair Lily’s face eagerly for a commutation of the sentence he is passing on himself. “ My poem is of no importance whatever, only I thought perhaps you might like to be able to say something about it this afternoon to my sister, the marchioness ; but perhaps you will not be able to find time to go there ? ”

Not go there ! not go to the marchioness’s ! Dismayed at such a frightful possibility, Lily Garwood determines on sacrificing Colonel Wakefield on the spot.

“ I shall read the poem for its own sake,

Mr. Powell, and not for the sake of speaking about it to any one, or writing about it, for the matter of that, though it will be useful to me to be able to say something about it in my London letter ; so I'll just come off with you now, Mr. Powell, and hear it ; and it will be a long time before I forgive *you*, Colonel Wakefield, for trying to make me put my poor bit of prose before Mr. Powell's poetry."

She leads the way to the door as she speaks, and Mr. Powell follows with a smile and a strut ; that is the one straw too much for that already over-weighted camel, the colonel.

" I must resign myself to the disappointment," he says gallantly, " and I only trust that you will criticise Mr. Powell's poem as frankly and freely as I would your military incident ; if you do so, perhaps he may pro-

duce something eventually, worthy of publication, and I heartily hope he may."

This is said with such surface civility that Mr. Powell, though he girds against it, has no right to resent it. So he deigns no reply, but follows Lily silently to a tiny little sitting-room at the end of the passage, which, without paying anything extra for it, Miss Garwood has contrived to appropriate solely to her own use. Here the well-matched pair of humbugs pose ; the lady in a plump and comfortable arm-chair, the bard on a low wide stool, which affords no support to his poor aching old back, at her feet. And here, for two hours, she listens to the weakest verbiage, and listens with an air of interest and pleasure, that not one woman in a thousand could portray about a thing that bored her. But Lily Garwood is playing for high stakes. She dreams dreams,

and sees visions of herself as a young matron, married to an old man of family and position and wealth ; leading London society, courted and admired both for the graces of her person and her intellectual powers. So dreaming there is nothing incongruous in the act, when, the reading finished, the reader raises the white and well-shaped hand of the listener to his withered old lips. “ How hard and dry they are,” Miss Garwood thinks calmly ; “ it’s too bad that a fine handsome girl like me should have to put up with the attentions of a dried-up old stick ! but—he can make me the sister-in-law of a marchioness.”

He is still holding her hand, he is still gazing up with an enraptured look into her steady handsome face, when the door opens and Mrs. Varney looks in.

“ I heard that Mr. Powell was reading his

new poem to you, and as all the rooms are public and common property, I thought I might come and share in the treat, but—I fear I'm an intruder?"

"Pray come in," Miss Garwood says affably, delighted at having been caught in a situation which compromises Mr. Powell; "we don't mind Mrs. Varney, do we?" she adds confidently to Mr. Powell, who is in the delicate dilemma of doubting, fearing, and loving this extremely talented young lady.

"I do not know that I have any special reason to mind Mrs. Varney now, more than at any other time," he says stiffly, receding as far from his Lily as the proportions of the stove will admit of.

"Then *may* I hear your poem?" Mrs. Varney asks sweetly, feeling that if this old man is matrimonially inclined, she may as



well enter the lists and fight for him against this bold new-comer.

“ His poem is not to be read again till it’s published.”

Miss Garwood, who has been quite sufficiently bored by it already, replies quickly, and Mr. Powell in his gratitude to her for sparing him the re-reading, sidles up nearer to her again, and is rewarded by her resting her hand on his bony old shoulder in a way that “ made her *blush*,” Mrs. Varney afterwards avers, when describing the scene. “ If he is not engaged to her, she ought to be ashamed of herself,” the good lady adds, not taking into consideration the fact of Mr. Powell having any power of resistance in him.

“ Will your sister think it odd that you should introduce me? ” Lily says innocently to him as they are about to enter Lady

Claymore's house. She has reserved her question till the last moment, in order that he may have no opportunity of backing out of the undertaking.

"No," he says, regarding her calculatingly, "you're professional, you see, and so a man is able to pay you many attentions which it would be impossible for him to offer to women of his own class."

The door is opened at the moment, and they are ushered in before she can collect her faculties, orderly as they are, and reply to this.

The Marchioness of Claymore is a large, fair, fat, grand blond-haired matron, full of happy repose and tolerant amiability to the inferior orders. She receives Miss Garwood as politely as if she remembered what her brother has said to her in the young lady's favour, and having performed that

obvious duty, sails about some of her other guests, leaving Miss Garwood in strange waters without a pilot. All the other people know each other ! The conversation is made up of light allusions to past events, which are familiar to the majority, and references to amusements and engagements in the future, in which they are all concerned. For a time, Miss Garwood feels like a stray sheep. She is outside this fashionable flock ; and though she is capable (and knows it) of saying better things than any one of them are saying, she is silent, from sheer embarrassment and mortification.

“ I am afraid you’re finding it dull,” Mr. Powell says to her, once coming near her for an instant, in a shy and constrained way, that she *mentally* resolves to punish him for as soon as they are on neutral ground again. Here he seems to have a

firmer stand-point, and to be of importance as he stands in the light of his sister's graciousness and grandeur. "But he's a miserable little sneak at heart," she thinks indignantly, "or he wouldn't let me sit here without a soul to speak to ; if I once get a hearing, I'll make them listen to me ! But I find in society, people won't be amused by any one to whom they haven't been properly introduced." She grows rather glum in aspect as she thinks this, and, after the manner of all women who feel themselves neglected, she looks at her worst. Unluckily, this is the moment when observation is directed to her by her hostess.

"Do you see that young lady sitting over there alone?" the marchioness says to a sister peeress (who is æsthetic and artistic, and inclined to cultivate all sorts of people who do things).

Yes, Lady Desborough sees the young lady, and has been wondering why she doesn't prefer wearing nothing at all to dressing so extremely badly.

“ Well, she has written something, I don't know what, but I hear it's very good,” the marchioness goes on to explain; “ she wants to see something of our ways in order to give a touch of variety to her descriptions of London Society; and so my brother Powell, who is always good-natured, has brought her here; but do you see she doesn't get on, or seem happy ? ”

“ It's difficult to get on vivaciously with the chairs and tables, and there's no human bit of furniture near her,” says Lady Desborough, raising her eye-glass deliberately, and giving Lily Garwood a stare that would discompose most girls serving their novitiate in London Society. But though Lily is a

novice she is not easily discomposed. She returns Lady Desborough's stare with quiet interest. "Do you know," Lady Desborough whispers to the marchioness, "that young lady, awkward as she looks, and meekly as she sits there, is capable of writing a rasping account of your reception!"

"I don't think she'll be so ungrateful," Lady Claymore says stoutly, "my brother is very kind to her, and in return—"

"She will make him make a fool of himself," Lady Desborough laughs. "I shall go over and cultivate her! she may be a pleasant acquaintance, and I'm sure she can be a bitter enemy."

Miss Garwood's spirit is in rebellion by the time Lady Desborough reaches her. She has been left over long to her own reflections, and they have not been pleasant.

"I hear you are so hard at work re-

producing us and our ways that you have hardly time to come among us, Miss Garwood," Lady Desborough says, dropping down easily into a seat by the side of the offended genius; "still, though I hear this, I shall be happy to see you at my Thursdays."

"And I shall be very glad to come," Miss Garwood says sturdily, "for I am just doing a novel, showing up London Society, Lady Desborough; and it's given in to me, that though I've only been in London a short time, I know more about what's going on, and see through people more clearly than many of you who have been living here half your lives."

"You must have unusual opportunities to have found out so much about us in such a short time." Lady Desborough says pleasantly.

"That I have," Miss Garwood says

glibly ; “ I’m staying with a friend of Lady Claymore’s and Mr. Powell’s. I have to be very particular, of course, but I think that I may safely know any one to whom they introduce me.”

“ I think you may,” Lady Desborough says drily ; “ still I’d advise you to be very careful.”

“ That’s what my aunt, Miss McTurnan, says. ‘ Lily,’ says she, ‘ a clever, handsome girl like you, ought to marry well in London, and you’ll do it, if you don’t get with the wrong sort ; ’ not that I want to marry.”

“ Or to get with the ‘ wrong sort,’ for that matter, either,” Lady Desborough puts in laughingly ; “ I think you and your aunt are quite right, and come to me next Thursday.”

Her ladyship goes away laughing, and

amused. “She’s a noble savage,” she says to the marchioness, “guileless as a child, and *extremely* clever; we must do all we can for her.”

The marchioness looks languidly, over her handsome fat shoulder, at the object of their discourse.

“I am not certain about her being a noble savage, but I am that she is extremely clever, and I don’t think that we need try to play the part of Providence to her; she will never lose a chance through bashfulness.”

“She is staying with a friend of yours, she tells me. Who is it?”

“Really I don’t know, some acquaintance of my brother’s. She has been more valiant than discreet in saying so much, but if the fiction is advantageous to her, she shall benefit by it without let or hindrance from me.”

CHAPTER III.

BONNIE BOHEMIA.

“ Though the latitude's rather uncertain,
And the longitude's equally vague,
That person I pity who knows not the city,
The beautiful city of Prague.”

DISMAL as that hour of solitude in Lady Claymore's drawing-room was in passing, Lily Garwood is amply rewarded for having endured it so stoically now that it is over. The halo of the marchioness's indisputable rank and position is about her when she sits down to dinner with the select circle in Darlington Crescent, and even Mrs. Varney is impressed with the easy way in which the fair campaigner

mentions the many distinguished people whom she has just met.

Fortunately, Mr. Powell is dining out, therefore she is not under the slightest restraint. Her sketches of various phases of the afternoon's entertainment are in free-hand drawing of the boldest kind.

"They are the nicest people I've ever met. I was at home with them in a minute," she says in answer to Mrs. Varney's eager inquiry as to "How she has enjoyed herself?" "You see it made it pleasanter for me, my aunt, Miss McTurnan, being in the habit of staying up with their friends the Inchquins, close to their place."

"And of course your being so *very* intimate with Mr. Powell would be an additional reason why you would be quite at home with his sister," Mrs. Withers says pleasantly.

“Oh! I don’t know that,” Mrs. Varney interrupts, “people tell me that he makes a great deal more of ‘my sister the Marchioness,’ than ‘my sister the Marchioness’ makes of him; for my part I should object to being introduced to an aristocratic set in such a way; it seems to me that if Mr. Powell wanted you to go to his sister, that he should have made his sister call on you, and invite you to dinner. I look upon being asked to an afternoon at-home as being tolerated merely.” Mrs. Varney laughs vivaciously and spitefully as she says this, and for a few moments a slight additional colour in Miss Garwood’s face shows that she has felt the sting. But she recovers herself speedily, and says,

“You see it’s the fashion to ask celebrities without boring them with a preli-

minary call ; they take it for granted that we haven't time for such conventionalities. I took it quite as a compliment being asked in such a way, and when I got there they were all about me like a hive of bees, wanting me to promise that I'd go to them. But I must work, and going out so much upsets that, so I only agreed to go to one, Lady Desborough ; she's a great patron of art and literature, and I'm to meet everybody worth knowing in London there next Thursday."

" *I* am going to a house to-night where there will be a great many celebrities and a great deal of talent," Mrs. Varney says complacently ; " literary people and artists, and great opera singers. I was going to ask if you would like to go, but, perhaps, your introduction to the Mar-



chioness of Claymore's circle has spoilt you for mine."

"I should like to go wherever there are clever people to be met, it does me good. I'm only a struggling author still, you know," she adds, with well-timed modesty, "and if I could meet some reviewers? I know *all* the reviews are got by personal interest; if they like you, they praise your book—"

"And they're sure to like *you*," Mrs. Withers puts in admiringly, for she looks upon her young lady boarder as being likely to retain Mr. Powell at least two months longer than usual in Darlington Crescent.

"Well, if you like to be chaperoned by me, I will take you to my friends to-night with pleasure," Mrs. Varney says grandiloquently. "She is a lady of great attain-

ments herself. She has written reams of poetry that would put Mr. Powell's, which you admire so much, *quite* into the shade; and she recites marvellously. At present she devotes most of her time to painting."

"Is she in the Academy? If she is, I'll give her a notice in my London letter," Miss Garwood says promptly.

"No; she has not sent anything to the Academy *this* year," Mrs. Varney says, as if *this* year were a sad exception for the Academy; "in fact, she does not care to exhibit; she has a *clientèle* who buy her pictures as fast as she can paint them, and as she makes quite a handsome income by them already, she is not desirous of increasing her connection."

"Ah! well, I'll mention her if I can in one of my London letters," Miss Garwood says patronisingly. "Every one is glad to

get a favourable mention from a real critic.
What is her name?"

"She is Mrs. Sykes," says Mrs. Varney;
"a most charming woman, very handsome
and extremely popular with the gentlemen."

"Is she one of these regular professional
beauties and flirts?" Miss Garwood asks,
with an air of supreme virtue, "because
I've made up my mind that I'll never
have anything to do with that sort; they
always try to take away men from young
girls, and flatter men by making love to
them."

"My friend is quite superior to anything
of that sort," Mrs. Varney says angrily.

"Well, I'll just go and see for myself,
then, to-night," Miss Garwood says with
the careless air of one who is conferring a
great favour, and hopes that too much may
not be thought of it. In reality she is

rejoiced to go, for she has a firm belief that it needs but for her to smile upon the critics in order to bring them to her feet, and win nought but praise from them for her much talked-of next novel! Moreover, she can bring home a caricature account of it, for the benefit and amusement of Mr. Powell to-morrow. Perhaps, even, what she tells him may make him desire to accompany her to Mrs. Sykes on another occasion, and if he begins going out with her promiscuously, "he will find himself compromised into holy matrimony with me, before he knows what he is about," she tells herself hopefully.

It is the night of Mrs. Sykes's regular weekly reception, and her rooms are crowded when Mrs. Varney and Miss Garwood arrive. Mrs. Sykes is a fair, fine-looking, portly, handsome woman, with the reputation

of being extremely industrious, and of having been cruelly treated by Captain Sykes, from whom she is now separated. In pursuing her artistic course, she is brought in contact with a vast number of the denizens of "the beautiful City of Prague." Her house, in fact, is a head centre in bonnie Bohemia; and though many of her dearest friends wonder and speculate behind her back, about how her numerous flirtations will end, she has never had stones openly thrown at her yet.

It is a very mixed company, this which is assembled in her picturesque Early-English drawing-room, to-night. In the course of ten minutes, "the chiel who's among them taking notes" for the next novel, is introduced to a prince of a branch of the house of Bourbon; a great tragedian, several young poets in velvet coats and

with loosely flowing and rather unkempt locks, an American lady journalist, the jovial looking editor of one of the most viciously and scandalously ill-natured of the weekly papers, a band of five or six ladies, each one of whom "contributes to some of the magazines;" a fast fashionable novelist who looks down visibly on these aforesaid ladies, because her own novels command high prices, and her birth and social position entitle her to go to Court; the painter of one of *the* pictures of the year, and a clever-looking little gentleman who is merely mentioned to her as Mr. Carter.

It is all very dazzling, amusing, and perplexing to the tyro who does not desire to be known as such. Recognised at once as having produced works of uncommon merit, she meets with what she herself

terms “a fine reception” here, in one of the favourite haunts of literature and art. Not for one instant is she allowed to feel herself a stranger or neglected, her pretty cordial hostess appears to have an inexhaustible supply of men, who are one and all ready to obey her will and pleasure. And it is her will and pleasure to-night that Miss Garwood shall be given the freedom of the society, and made to feel herself a member of the guild without delay. With one eye on the Bourbon Prince de Kermes, and the other on a literary nobleman whose books have a colossal sale, on account of the beautiful impartiality with which he lays bare the faults, follies, and indiscretions of his own class, Miss Garwood comes to the rapid conclusion that “if there is an Elysium on earth, it is here, it is here !”

“This is the proper place for me. I’m lost at that wretched old boarding-house,” she says to herself, and her astute mind instantly begins working out the problem of how she is to accomplish her purpose of sojourning for a time under Mrs. Sykes’s pleasant roof.

Fate and fortune seem to favour her, as they have of doing for those who are always ready to fight for themselves. The prince, about whom there is nothing foreign but his name, apparently has an English love for a horse, and an English way of showing it. He has been amusing himself lately, by driving a four-in-hand coach between London and Weybridge, and now he begins describing the scenery through which he passes to Miss Garwood, and Miss Garwood listens enraptured.

“I’m going down again on Monday,” he

says ; “ you should get your friend Mrs. Sykes to come and bring you with her ; we drive down, lunch at the Oatland Park Hotel, take a fly out to St. George’s Hill, and come back quietly in the cool of the evening ; it’s quite the thing to do now, to coach out of town two or three times a week.”

“ I should like nothing better,” Lily says in a flutter, “ it would be useful to me, too, not only the scenery, which I *must* get up in some way, but as an experience of London life, and the way you amuse yourselves. I am writing a novel showing up London Society—”

“ Ah! indeed,” the prince cuts in ; his mind is full of the coaching, and he does not care a farthing about Miss Garwood’s great work. “ Well, you get Mrs. Sykes to bring you on Monday, and you shall have the box seat,

and I'll point out all the lions as we go along."

"If you'd propose it to her!" she says, suppressing her intense eagerness to go very cleverly. "I'm sure she would do it if you would only propose it to her, indeed it would be impossible for her to refuse you."

"Oh! I'll ask her in a minute. Mrs. Sykes and I are old friends; we keep up a standing flirtation, and fall back upon it whenever we've neither of us got hold of anyone more amusing than the other; I'll ask her in a minute, for Monday, isn't it?"

"Yes, Monday you said," Miss Garwood says, trembling with agitation, and feeling that she may be a princess before the end of the season, if only Mrs. Sykes will give her the chance of driving down to Weybridge on the box-seat by the side of the Prince de Kermes. She sees him elbowing his way

through the crowd to the hostess, and she sees that lady's look of laughing amazement when he proffers his request, but she can neither hear what they say nor can she read the expression of Mrs. Sykes' face clearly.

“Come down with me on Monday, and bring your young friend Miss Garwood with you; she tells me she wants to write about the road, and I can tell her more than most men, can't I?” the prince says with the air of one who is privileged.

“You are cool. I never saw my young friend, Miss Garwood, before to-night; but I suppose I may as well say yes at once; you always get me to do what you wish,” Mrs. Sykes replies, levelling a pathetic look at him.

They are a practised pair of old staggers, yet they go on playing off their little flirting airs and tricks upon one another as freshly as if

they were still young, innocent, loving, and unsophisticated. And they do this in the face of the fact that each knows the other to be a humbug, "She looks in the same way at other fellows, but it means nothing ! if she cares for anyone, it is for me," he tells himself ; and she thinks, "He flatters any number of horrible women grossly, but if he *has* a *heart* at all, I'm the only one who has ever touched it."

"Then do what I wish now, and come down on my coach on Monday ; I'll get up a picked lot," he says with the air of one who is accustomed to settle things and have them his own way.

"Very well ! I'll ask her presently ; am I not good-natured ? Of course, *I* have the box-seat by you."

"Oh ! that goes without saying," he says, quietly throwing over all consideration for

the voluntary offer he has made of the box seat to Miss Garwood, and the hopes he has consequently raised in that young lady's breast. "Wherever we go together, the place of honour is yours, my dear madam."

Then she blushes, and lowers her pathetic blue eyes, and puts her hand on his arm, and together they go away to a remote boudoir, and improve the shining minutes of solitude by flirting as vigorously as the youngest and most enamoured pair in the room. Lily Garwood sees them vanish through the doorway of this boudoir, and in some occult way she finds out that there is no one in the room besides themselves.

"I shall remember this for you some day, Mrs. Sykes," she says to herself. "A woman living apart from her husband oughtn't to shut herself up in a room alone with a French prince."

She keeps watch and ward over this boudoir-door assiduously until it opens, and Mrs. Sykes comes out among her guests again, followed, to Lily's chagrin and disappointment, by Mrs. Varney! So there is nothing compromising in the situation after all.

“I have just been telling Mrs. Varney that I am going to ask you to go on a coaching expedition on Monday, Miss Garwood,” the pretty hostess says, addressing Lily at once. “The prince particularly wishes to introduce you to some fine scenery down at Weybridge, in order that you may introduce it into your next novel.”

“I shall be very glad to go if I can get off a half engagement I’ve made with Lady Desborough,” Miss Garwood replies.

“You see, Miss Garwood is in such request, I hardly thought I should have got

her to come here to-night, for, as I told you, she has already been to a large reception at the Marchioness of Claymore's," Mrs. Varney puts in. Having brought Miss Garwood, she is determined to make the most of that lady; what is the use of knowing some one who consorts with gilded dukes and belted earls unless you make mention of these latter when mingling with your less fortunate fellow-creatures?

"The prince is accustomed to have his invitations accepted as commands," Mrs. Sykes says reflectively; she knows as well as possible that the prince is not accustomed to anything of the sort. Still it sounds well to say it, there is a touch of reigning royalty about the sentiment; so she utters it.

"I'll get off it with Lady Desborough. I can go to her any day," Lily says audaciously; "and I'm to have the box-seat the

prince says, and he'll post me up in the scenery."

Mrs. Sykes opens her eyes so wildly that they do not look in the least pathetic.

"The box-seat on the prince's coach is always *mine*," she says with an emphasis that teaches Miss Garwood that, until she is more firmly established, it behoves her to be very wary.

"I'll let the prince know how she boasts about him and appropriates him, before I'm much older," the grateful guest says to herself.

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER GREEN LEAVES.

It is Monday morning, and Miss Garwood is on the top of the coach, which is being driven for a few weeks this season by the scion of an illustrious and royal house at present a little out of luck. They have just swept through the Oatlands Park Hotel gates in a masterly manner, and are presently brought up at the grand entrance to the hotel in a swinging yet compact style that is beyond all praise. Miss Garwood feels her spirits rising, and that there is balm in Gilead still, as she looks around on the long alleys and sweet sylvan glades of the

grand expanse of park-land, in the midst of which the hotel is set. A walk through one of these leafy glens with the prince after luncheon ; this is what she aims at. A walk with him alone, unfettered by the presence of the pretty Mrs. Sykes, whom she is already beginning to hate cordially.

The pleasure of the drive down has not been without serious alloy ; in the first place Miss Garwood has had some trouble in getting away with flying colours from Darlington Crescent. " You don't mean to say that you're going to drive with that fellow who calls himself a Bourbon prince, do you ? " Mr. Powell asks with biting contempt. " He has taken in a lot of foolish women, who believe in his imaginary rank and misfortunes ; but I never thought he would add *you* to the list of his dupes."

" He is very kind, and Mrs. Sykes seems

to think that his claim to being of the blood royal of France is a genuine one ; of course, he has been unfortunate, and nearly all his property has been taken from him under the Imperial dynasty, but——”

“ But, my dear girl, pardon me, you know nothing about it ; my sister the marchioness wouldn’t have him in her house ; Claymore wouldn’t know him ; he hangs about at second-rate houses, and gets his name mixed up with those of pretty second-rate women, like your friend Mrs. Sykes for instance ; but he is never seen at the French embassy, or at one of our good clubs ; the fact is he hails from Jersey, where he has picked up a French accent.”

“ He must have money to drive a four-in hand,” Lily says doggedly. The title of prince is very dear to her ; she is ready to do very doughty deeds in defence of the one



who says he bears it. Powell and his sister the marchioness sink into utter insignificance as she contemplates the claim of this off-shoot of the house of Bourbon.

“He drives a coach from London to Weybridge, and takes fares from his passengers,” Powell explains; “it’s a regular mercantile transaction; the coach is started and horsed by several gentlemen who like the fun of driving and the humours of the road; but who don’t care to be altogether out of pocket by their fad. You are mistaken if you think that he shows more favour by offering you the drive, than he shows to any strange woman who comes to the White Horse in Piccadilly, any day he is starting, and offers him her fare.”

“I’m to have the box-seat anyhow,” Miss Garwood says vauntingly. Then, to her mortification, she finds when she meets

Mrs. Sykes that the box-seat is held sacred to that lady, and that the prince has entirely forgotten that he has promised it to her, Lily Garwood.

Nor is this all. Mrs. Sykes is most becomingly and charmingly dressed this morning. Her little black lace bonnet, with the white roses crowning it, nestles in a ravishing manner among the luxuriant masses of her silky, soft-looking, golden-brown hair, and her fair face looks young and innocent as a child's in the morning light. Lily gets many maddening glimpses of this face, as its owner keeps on turning it with a winning upward look, and more pathos than ever in the eyes towards the happy prince who is driving them.

“The woman is flirting disgracefully, indecently, for a married woman!” Lily says to herself, becoming more moral each

moment, under the influence of manly neglect. Is it for this she has renounced Powell and his poetry to-day? to be put up on the top of a coach between two strange ladies, who regard her with the passive aversion Englishwomen are apt to bestow upon every woman to whom they have not been properly introduced? (considering probably that this precautionary measure balances any imprudence as regards latitudinarian acquaintanceships with the nobler sex).

Somewhere behind, on the back seat of the coach, in fact, Lily catches sight of a gentleman whom she does not recognise, for some time, as Mr. Carter. When she does realise him, her spirits rise a little. If the worst comes to the worst, and Mrs. Sykes does most improperly continue to monopolise the driver during the remainder of the day, Miss Garwood feels confident that she

will be able to fall back on Carter ; " and if he's as rich as Mrs. Varney boasts, there's no saying that I mayn't do the best thing for myself in marrying him," she says to herself, never a doubt or fear relative to his readiness to marry her assailing her mind.

But now they have descended from the coach and are loitering about, waiting while some additions which Mrs. Sykes has proposed to the ordinary cold luncheon are being made. Mrs. Sykes has the habit of keeping up her expansive frame on the daintiest viands that are procurable under all circumstances. Not even the devotion of the overthrown Bourbon would compensate her for being compelled to eat cold beef and pickles on the present occasion. So cutlets of salmon and lamb are being prepared, and chickens are being broiled and fricasseed and curried for her refection presently. Mean-

while she is sweeping about on the lawn in front of the hotel with Prince de Kermes by her side, looking wonderfully fair and handsome and happy. "Much too happy for a woman who is separated from her husband," Lily thinks, and Miss Garwood determines to treasure up the reflection and the incident that calls it forth for future use.

"It's my duty to myself to get as much as I can out of this season, so I shall go out with Mrs. Sykes as often as she'll take me ; but I don't like the woman for all that, and my belief is, she's trying to trap the prince into a marriage ; she'll go on till her husband hears of it, and interferes by bringing an action for divorce, and then of course the pressure of public opinion will compel De Kermes to marry her ; she's a nice piece, to be sure ; I have a great mind to give De Kermes a warning to-day."

Miss Garwood's mind is so constituted that it no sooner surmises the wildest thing, or conjectures the improbable, than it proceeds to accept and argue upon either as established facts. Directly she has sketched out the imaginary programme of the course of action she fancies Mr. and Mrs. Sykes are likely to pursue, she believes firmly that they are pursuing it, and that it therefore behoves her, as an intimate friend of a day's standing of the prince's, to offer him fair and frank warning. She is looking at the pair with gloom on her brow, and depression in her whole expression and attitude, when Mr. Carter comes up and addresses her.

"You are wasting this lovely day, Miss Garwood, by staying here in the hall. Come out and let me show you some of the finest cedars in England; there is a great deal of historical interest attaching to this place,

but I suppose Mrs. Sykes has done guide-book for you ? She knows this district by heart, or ought to know it so, at least, for she visits it often enough with the Prince de Kermes."

There is a little spite in Mr. Carter's tone and manner which is excusable under the circumstances. In days not so very long gone-by, Mrs. Sykes reserved her sweetest smiles, her prettiest bonnets, her best complexion, and most luxuriant and well-studied careless arrangement of the hair for Mr. Carter. In those same not very long gone-by days, Mrs. Sykes raved of this gentleman's artistic feeling, tastes and culture, and declaring that a man's a man for a' that, turned a deaf ear to the reminders that were offered to her as to his being a partner in a drapery establishment in Bond Street. He was different to all other drapers, Mrs. Sykes avowed ; his draperies were all high art in



design, and sumptuous in material. Moreover, he paints and composes, and sings, and strikes the light guitar in the most commendable manner, and is universally admitted to be a right good fellow by men, and is smiled upon with zeal and encouragement by women. But his day is done as far as Mrs. Sykes is concerned. The prince has toppled over her judgment for the time being, and while the glamour of his royal smiles and attentions is about her, she cannot discern merit in any other man. With true womanly perception she sees the real princely presence in the puffy, padded form of the Anglo-Frenchman. Additionally the Prince is lavish of tangible proofs of his admiration, and Mrs. Sykes likes rich gifts, especially when they are accompanied by words of sweet import. Accordingly the star of the scion of the house of

Bourbon has been very much in the ascendant with the pretty and versatile lady of late, and Mr. Carter feels aggrieved at the preference shown to his rival, and altogether very much inclined to allow his heart to be caught in the rebound by Lily Garwood.

They stroll away together now towards the lake, and then make a slight *détour*, under the shelter of green trees all the while, finally arriving at the grand old spreading fruit-laden cedar, where they sit down and pursue sweet and bitter converse. Here they are seen by Mrs. Sykes, who has meanwhile been taking the prince for a sentimental stroll through the burial ground of the favourite dogs of the late Duchess of York. In this secluded spot the lady has succeeded in making good headway towards an even more satisfactory tacit understanding with

Prince de Kermes than has hitherto existed. She has been tenderly retrospective, and has murmured in dulcet accents lines of thrilling verse, relating her own sensations when many years ago one of her own pet dogs died, and in due course of time she stood at his grave.

“ Only a dog ! yes only,
Yet these are bitter tears ;
Weary and heartsick and lonely,
I turn to the coming years.

A form that was once familiar,
A heart I could always trust,
A friend who always loved me,
Lies mouldering here to dust.

Faithful and loving and tender,
Gentle and generous and brave,
My pet, my playmate, my darling !
And this is his lonely grave.”

“ Those are very sweet verses,” the prince says solemnly ; “ your own, I feel sure ? ”

Mrs. Sykes shakes her head sadly, and

sweetly replies in the negative, with the air of one who could have written the verses if she had liked, but not having done so, is now amiably ready and willing to resign all the credit that may accrue from them to their real author.

“No; I did not write them,” she says softly, “I only feel them.”

“And to appreciate fully is, I think, a higher gift than to write forcibly,” he says with effusion; “still, it’s very good and generous of you—just like your charming self, in fact—to renounce the honour of the authorship of that poem in favour of some one else; but I am sure, painting exquisitely as you do, that you would write bewitchingly if you only tried.”

“I could never satisfy myself, though I might please the popular mind; besides, I am alone and unprotected, and the critics

would take advantage of that fact, and write harshly of me, and I should pay the penalty in public that all women, who have been unhappy enough to marry badly, pay sooner or later if they strive to elevate themselves above the common herd."

"Your friend, Miss Garwood, suffers no such modest fears to restrain her?"

"Because she is so undoubtedly clever that no one—not even a carping critic of her own sex—can deny the fact; and she's fearless and frank by nature, I should think," Mrs. Sykes adds cordially. "If she has anything to say, she would just as soon utter it for all the world to hear, as murmur it in the dark in a closet."

"According to you she is clever, fearless, and frank! that is a fine character for a woman," he says meditatively.

"Yes; but I don't want your thoughts to

dwell on her exclusively," the lady says plaintively; "I can't afford to lose your friendship, or divide it with another, now that I have just won it."

"The friendship I have for you is unlike anything I can ever feel for another," Prince de Kermes says; and even as he says it he knows that he is stating more than the truth, and making a fool of himself. Nevertheless, the situation is one that it is difficult, nay, impossible, to treat coolly and sensibly. The scenery is lovely, the air is caressingly mild and balmy, the woman is surpassingly fair and seductively soft in manner and voice. What wonder that he incontinently casts himself for a part which he can never play fairly. What wonder that he suffers himself to be carried away by these outside influences into that strange "inner circle" which Mrs.

Sykes has the art of drawing about herself.

“Friendship is love, without his wings,” she quotes; “once felt it must be felt for ever, I think. I would rather hear what you have told me this morning respecting the feeling you have for me, than I would receive the most ardent protestations of love and passion from you or any man.”

“The dubious neutral ground between love and friendship may be long and safely trodden until suddenly he, who believed himself to be but a friend, is in an instant transformed into a lover,” he quotes in return; and as he speaks the luncheon-gong sounds, and, luckily for him, Mrs. Sykes is hungry.

“Friendship such as yours could be to a woman is too serious a thing to be discussed idly” she says, tenderly pressing the arm

on which she is leaning. "I must go and look after Miss Garwood."

"She's all right with Carter, who seems rather hard hit," the prince interrupts. "That young lady can look after herself; rest assured of that."

"It *is* hard to give up this hour that we might spend so happily under green leaves, to eating and drinking, isn't it?" Mrs. Sykes says, "but" (she is desperately hungry, and will sacrifice a good deal in order to immediately satisfy her healthy appetite) "what will they think, what will they *say*, prince, if we absent ourselves? I am so unhappily situated that I have to be doubly careful, you know; and you, *my friend*, must aid me in my endeavour to do what looks right."

He frets at the interruption, for he does not happen to be hungry, and he does like

this sweet hour in these green woods with this fair lady. He has not much poetry in his nature, but he has enough to know that this episode is an idyll which may not quickly recur again. All the surroundings seem to combine to render it possible for him to say a great deal, and mean very little ; and this is a position which is dear to the heart of the Prince de Kermes. So he strives to detain her down among the dead dogs of the Duchess of York. But she, with an eye to the inevitable by-and-by, knows that unless she breaks this prolonged fast of hers now, she will be pale and peevish when St. George's Hill has to be scaled. Scenting the salmon and lamb cutlets from afar, she discreetly insists upon bringing their *tête-à-tête* stroll to a close, and takes her seat with matronly dignity at the luncheon-table in time to discover that Miss

Garwood is still indiscreetly promenading in the grounds. "With Carter, too," she thinks. "How injudicious it was of me to let that clever *intrigante* get hold of a back number of my life! She'll read through the lines and misinterpret the reading, and, perhaps, judge me a little more harshly than I deserve."

So the pretty woman thinks uneasily, as her appetite fails her, while she is earnestly waiting for the appearance of the young lady who has been committed to her charge, who now comes in laughing and flushed and expectant.

It has been very pleasant to Miss Garwood, this time she has passed with Mr. Carter under the shade of the old cedar. She has played the *ingénue* so successfully that he almost feels himself to be a "scoundrel for flirting in such a pronounced way"

with an admirable young woman whom he can never ask to be his wife. *Why* he can “never ask her to be his wife” is one of those mysteries which we may not lightly attempt to unravel. His friends will probably aver that it is because he is so unselfish and honourable that he could not endure to “drag a girl into a false position, one in which she would have plenty of money, and no place worth mentioning in society.” His enemies (if such an amiable, smiling, accomplished gentleman has any) would, on the other hand, be likely to assert that, not having boundless wealth at command, he does not desire to make any woman the *legal* partner of his pleasures and expenses. But for the time being he is very pleasant to Lily Garwood, and her hopes run high. To be a married woman with a house that has fine entertaining

capabilities about it, and plenty of money in London, is Lily's current ambition. A dazzling vista of possibilities (that shall end harmlessly, and eventually redound to her credit) stretches away before her as she sits under the grand cedar and listens to Mr. Carter's impassioned platitudes.

But presently, she, too, hears the luncheon-gong, and being a wise virgin, she rises to go in without delay.

“For I don’t want Mrs. Sykes’s tongue on me, Mr. Carter,” she explains, as he expostulates about her haste to leave him. “I like Mrs. Sykes, but I don’t want her tongue on me ; she’s all very well till one crosses her, I fancy ; and I can’t help being younger than she is, you know ; but I can read Mrs. Sykes right off, and I’d rather not cross her.”

“I like her immensely, but she is rather

fickle and a bit of a flirt, I'm afraid," Carter says, under the influence of the demon jealousy.

"Yes, I like her immensely too, but one can't help seeing that she's a bad friend to herself, and so a dangerous friend for any young girl like me," Miss Garwood responds, gazing at Carter with such trustful, solemn eyes that he thinks all manner of good of the speaker, and all manner of evil of the spoken-about, on the spot.

"A pretty woman can't be too discreet," he says sententiously, not knowing what else to say.

"That's just it, Mr. Carter, she's not discreet; this prince that she goes about with, he may be a very nice man and amusing, and all that, but I don't like him one bit; she'll ruin herself with everybody if

she keeps going about with him ; but she's flattered, and foolish."

" *You* are not fetched by him ? I'm glad that at least you retain your head," he says, as they near the house ; " but do you think that Mrs. Sykes *really* cares for him, that there is any sentiment in their intercourse—"

Miss Garwood interrupts him with the heartiest and most ringingly unaffected laugh that she can raise at a moment's notice.

" If he has put any sentiment into their intercourse, my word ! but he'll have to pay for it," she says, " but *I* think he sees now she's seeking him, and he's trying to shake her off before it costs him too much."

Then they go in to luncheon, and Lily Garwood is frankly friendly with Mrs. Sykes, in a way that makes Mr. Carter feel

that his young lady *confidante* is not quite as unsophisticated as she seems to be.

“If she’s the innocent good girl I think her, she won’t countenance anything like a flirtation between that fellow and Mrs. Sykes, and it will be a good thing for Mrs. Sykes to be hauled up by an expression of genuine shock from a woman younger than herself,” he thinks, and it may be said for him that he is right so far. Miss Garwood decidedly will *not* countenance the prince’s flirtation with any woman, and she is quite ready to haul up any woman older or younger, more or less experienced than herself, who is rash and foolish enough in any way to come between Miss Garwood and the plans that young lady has laid for her own advancement.

But the time is not ripe for Miss Garwood to find flaws in Mrs. Sykes yet. So, behold

her at the luncheon-table, a free and fetterless thing, enjoying the novelty and untrammelled freshness of this expedition in a way that is delightful to witness, and that for the time completely takes in the more experienced woman of the world.

“ I’m happier than I’ve been all the while I’ve been in London, Mrs. Sykes,” she says, looking with large honest eyes at that lady ; “ it’s not in my right place or at home at all that I feel with that crew at Mrs. Withers’s. Mrs. Varney is all very well, but she’s a sly, back-biting woman, with never a good word in her smiling mouth for anyone, and I don’t like that sort ; it’s a shame to my own family that they don’t come up to London and give me a chance in society, but they’re all jealous of me, and that’s the real truth ; and it’s a great thing for me that you have given me your friendship, for of course I

can see at once that it will be a great advantage to me to go about with you."

Thus she runs in an unsophisticated way to Mrs. Sykes, who is touched into the folly of saying that she will welcome Miss Garwood cordially at all times "to stay for a week, or two even, if she likes to come." Before luncheon is over, Miss Garwood has arranged the day of her visit.

CHAPTER V.

KENSINGTON GARDENS.

“PLEASANT it is in the good greenwood,
where the mavis and merle are singing.”
The good greenwood of which we speak
is Kensington Gardens, the time is twelve
o’clock in the morning, and a few birds are
twittering about in the branches of the
grand old trees.

A pair are strolling slowly along one of
the most sequestered avenues, absorbed in
their topic and each other.

“I’m afraid you will think that this is a
very extraordinary step that I have taken,”

the lady says deprecatingly, “but what was there left for me to do ? I am staying in her house ; if I am not careful, people will say I’m tarred with the same brush as she is ; and I have no one to advise me, no friends to whom I can trust, at least no one but you ! ”

“ I am very much flattered by your confidence,” the gentleman replies, looking painfully perplexed, “ but really I can give you no advice in this matter ; if things are as you say, certainly the lady is not the most desirable chaperon you could have.”

“ Now I say nothing, Mr. Carter ; I’m not going to make mischief, I only tell you that I’m sorry to see her running after that man in the way she does, just because he is a prince, but I say nothing.”

“ Yet your last words are a strong

accusation against her, Miss Garwood ; if you don't wish me to think that you believe all sorts of unpleasant things about the lady with whom you are staying, you had better perhaps say no more about her. I tell you fairly, I may be made uncomfortable about and very sorry for her, but I can never think badly of her."

" She's so foolish, she won't listen to me," Miss Garwood says, disregarding his remark. " There's no harm in anything she does, but she's so foolish that she makes everybody think there's more than meets the eye ; I'm getting afraid to be seen with her, for it won't do for *me* to be talked about, you know, Mr. Carter."

Mr. Carter hints that the young lady has it within her power to withdraw from all association with Mrs. Sykes.

" No, I can't do that," Miss Garwood

says decidedly. “I *must* be in London on account of my writing, and I’ve no place else to go.” Then she presses her lips together as firmly as she can, and a look of noble resignation settles itself upon her brow, and presently she adds,

“It’s hard to feel that one’s chance of a grand career is spoilt because one can’t live in London; if I could only make my home here, I’d make a name that should be second to none in the world of letters.”

He looks at her, and she looks absorbed. “Has she the possibility of such a career before her!” he wonders; “would he without fail secure a share in the glory of it if he asks her to be his wife?”

“How many people would be only too glad to retain you in London; you need never leave it unless you wish,” he says

softly, and she determines not to lose her chance through any untimely exhibition of modest reserve.

“Tell me right out how I may remain here, and I’ll take the opportunity?”

The answer is so unexpected in its business-like literalness that Mr. Carter, whose proud boast it is that hitherto he has fluttered from flower to flower, sipping their sweetness with impunity to himself, is fairly nonplussed. There is a good deal of power about Miss Garwood, and she has the art of making herself appear a prominent figure, whether or not she has done anything to deserve that prominence. But at the same time, will that art serve her as well if she becomes his wife, as it does now society sees that she has no *impedimenta*? “A capital woman for a poor ‘gentleman by birth’ to marry,” he says to himself cyni-

cally, “but hardly the kind of wife to promote the interest of a rich tradesman. I fancy she would be wanting to lavish my money too freely on entertaining Bohemians, under the misguided impression that they in return would review her well, and generally forward that career which she intends to be a grand one.” All this he thinks as he strolls along in silence by Miss Garwood’s side, making no sign by which she shall gather what his ultimate intentions may be ; and assuming, with really considerable artistic power, the air of one who is sorely distraught.

“ You’ve no confidence in me, Mr. Carter,” she says presently, in a hurt tone, “ and I know well whom I have to thank for that being the case. I see through people too clearly for them to like me, if they’re concealing anything ; and I saw from the

first that neither Mrs. Sykes nor Mrs. Varney liked you showing me any attention."

" You think so ? " he asked with an air of interest, for on the whole he feels that it will be safer to let her exhaust her art of putting things in the abuse of these two ladies, than in being affectionate towards himself.

" Oh ! I know it," she says, sorely nettled at the ingenious way in which he is turning away from her point. " The fact is, they are both mad when they see any young girl put before them in any way. Mrs. Varney can't forgive me for having got my books published and well paid for, while hers lie upon the shelf in manuscript still ; and Mrs. Sykes can't forgive me about the prince—not that I'd look at him—the fat, vain old fool. But he has turned her head, and she thinks, there-

fore, that other women are as vain as herself; now I tell you, Mr. Carter, I'd rather have a nice quiet walk with you here, than I'd go down to the Orleans Club on the drag with that lot!"

"When are they going to the Orleans Club?" he asks impatiently, omitting to notice her compliment to himself.

"To-morrow! and Mr. Powell, an old friend of mine, a real aristocrat, the brother of the Marchioness of Claymore, begs me not to go with them; they're all second-rate, he says, and not the sort for me to be seen with."

Now Mr. Carter has not been invited to join the party on the drag, therefore he feels embittered, and in his bitterness he is, after the manner of men, weak! Moreover, Miss Garwood does exercise a certain fascination over him, and is altogether a most creditable

person to be "chaffed about" in his own set.

"I don't like to hear of this Mr. Powell," he murmurs insinuatingly. "I am getting to look upon him as my rival."

"My own people would like me to marry him, of course," she says, "but I've a will of my own, and not all his rank and fortune would tempt *me* to marry an old man."

"He hasn't much rank of his own, has he?" Carter says, laughing, and Lily Garwood pulls herself up with the reflection that the talk that dazzles her aunt, Miss McTurnan, is quite thrown away upon this acute Cockney.

"You'll be at Mrs. Sykes's this evening?" she says, as the moment comes for them to part.

"Yes,—do you contemplate remaining with her much longer?"

“I don’t know about that; you see I don’t want to hurt her feelings by going away abruptly, but it will come to that, I suppose.”

“Probably the marchioness will be inviting you soon,” he says, with twinkling eyes; and though she knows he is laughing at her, she says calmly,

“Probably she will; and though it will be a nice thing for me to go into the very best society there is, it will be an equally nice thing for them to have me; and indeed we are connected by marriage, my aunt, Miss McTurnan says, and it’s only becoming on the part of the Claymores to take me up and make my chance of doing well for myself in London a good one.”

It is an unfortunate speech, for it is made to the wrong man. From the moment she makes it, Mr. Carter resolves that no

blandishments on her part shall ever persuade him that it is right and fitting that they two should enter into holy matrimony, and breast the tide of life together.

“She’s an unscrupulous schemer,” he tells himself, forgetting that he has been guilty of quite as much deception in feigning devotion to her, as she has in feigning that his devotion is more acceptable to her than another’s. “She’s an unscrupulous schemer; and if I married her, she would humiliate me by letting every one see that it was for my money only she took me; no, my lady! I read you aright to-day.”

She walks home in a sombre mood after this parting with him, for she sees plainly enough that her game is up in that quarter.

“Your friend Mr. Carter isn’t much of a gentleman,” she says to Mrs. Sykes, as

they are waiting ready dressed for the theatre, to which the Prince de Kermes is to be their escort.

“Oh ! I don’t know, he’s a nice fellow I think,” Mrs. Sykes replies ; “and I tell you what, Lily, any girl who marries him will come in for a more than comfortable home, and a very nice position.”

“He’s only a draper after all,” Miss Garwood says scornfully, “that wouldn’t do for me ; and indeed some people would tell you I hadn’t much to thank you for, for having introduced such a man to me ; it would be a very bad thing for me if my name got coupled with his, as my aunt, Miss McTurnan—”

“Oh ! pray spare me her sentiments on the subject,” Mrs. Sykes interrupts impatiently. “You’re quite old enough and experienced enough to take care of yourself ;

and if it has come to this, that you've played for Johnnie Carter and lost him, take my advice and don't abuse him for your failure."

"Indeed, if you're ready to marry a London tradesman, I'm not," Scotia's daughter says scornfully, and Mrs. Sykes laughs.

"It won't do, Lily, or at least you *can't* do it; you know a little, and a very little it is, about London life as yet; and a little learning is a dangerous thing, you know. Your heart has not been engaged in the quest of Carter, that I quite admit; but your vanity and your interest have been; don't try the ostrich's futile plan; let the past rest. If you let the matter drop quietly, nothing malicious will be said about you; but if you abuse your late opponent at chess, and try to impute the making of

false moves to him, we shall all be down upon you for your want of judgment and want of honour; and as for your name “being coupled with his,” if it is so, *you* have done the coupling yourself.”

Miss Garwood listens quite calmly to all this. The instinct of self-preservation teaches her that it is useless for her to kick against the pricks, at the present juncture. She has flirted in rather a florid manner with Mr. Carter, and now that he has given her most plainly to understand that the flirtation means nothing, she knows that she is not in a position to resent this plain showing. “Never mind!” she thinks as the Prince de Kermes’ brougham rumbles up to the door. “I stand as good a chance as Mrs. Sykes does with the fat, fictitious old prince; better too, for I have no obstacle in my path in the shape of an absent husband

who is only semi-detached from me ; and if the prince means nothing, Mr. Powell worships the ground I tread on ! I'll have a better place in London than either Mrs. Sykes or Mrs. Varney yet."

She says this to herself with an engaging wink of one of the grand-looking eyes, that cause most people on whom they are bent to feel themselves very superficial.

The Prince de Kermes is rather more favourably impressed with the gifted and pleasant young lady this night than he has been hitherto. The play is Hamlet, and such a Hamlet and Ophelia as live the respective parts for their pleasure to-night, have surely never been seen together before on the modern stage. The actor has intensity, power, originality, and genius. He is utterly unlike any other Hamlet that has ever been presented to us, at the same time

we feel that he is the Hamlet Shakespeare knew. As for the Ophelia, "the words that would praise her are impotent things." There is such glory in her grace and beauty, that we should be too much dazzled by it, to see her clearly, were it not for the tears that are brought into our eyes by her pain and pathos.

The Prince de Kermes knows a good deal about actresses, but less than is well, perhaps, for an accomplished gentleman, about the merits of acting. He is not critical, yet he likes to be able to say something about the play, as well as about the plays. This being the case, Miss Garwood is an admirable companion for him at a theatre, about his visit to which he feels bound to say something. She is well read, in all the notices of the current Hamlet and Ophelia, or at least if she is not exactly

well read in the notices, she is thoroughly conversant with their spirit. She has the art of deducing much from little, whether correctly or not is quite a matter of chance. But as a rule, her deductions have an air of reality and veracity about them which is impressive. So now she quotes the best criticisms which have appeared in the best literary journals, with an air of originality that inspires the jovial pleasures of the field-loving Anglo-Frenchman with positive respect for her great and varied abilities. Mrs. Sykes, who is too much absorbed in the art that portrays nature so powerfully to have any time to bestow upon the consideration and discussion of what other people have said and thought about it leaves Miss Garwood a fair field this night. Already that ambitious lady is conjuring up visions of the graceful way in which

she will deport herself by-and-by, when she is firmly and legally united to this scion of a royal house. She will cut Mrs. Varney dead, and drop Mrs. Sykes quietly, she is deciding as they get into the carriage to go home. But as soon as they are seated, her dream is rudely dispelled, for Mrs. Sykes says, in most commonplace tones,

“I suppose the Princess de Kermes will soon be coming up to town, will she not?” and his tones are quite those of a well-established and perfectly satisfied family man, as he replies,

“Yes; the boy is so far restored to health that we both feel his mother may safely leave him now, and when he goes back to his tutors, madame will find me in town.”

“So he’s a married man?” Miss Gar-

wood says in bitter accents, as the two ladies sit down in Mrs. Sykes's drawing-room for a few minutes' talk over the events of the evening.

“Yes, didn't you know that?” Mrs. Sykes says, yawning; “she has been down at Eastbourne for some weeks nursing their only son through a very sharp attack of scarlet fever.”

“It's just like his selfishness to let her do that while he stayed in town enjoying himself,” Miss Garwood says collectedly, as if she knew all about it. “I never liked the man, and I made up my mind to-night that I'll have nothing more to say to him; I don't believe he is what he pretends to be one bit, and some of my friends think that he's not at all the sort of person who ought ever to have been introduced to me. I don't blame you, of course, but if you

knew as much of the world as I do, you'd think twice before you showed yourself in public with a man who is probably a mere adventurer if he's nothing worse."

Mrs. Sykes says nothing in reply to this exordium, but she lets her violet eyes rest for a moment upon Miss Garwood's face with a look of sparkling disdain that tells that perceptive young lady that the temporary alliance between her hostess and herself is in danger.

"I'll tell the marchioness to-morrow that this is not the kind of house for me to be in, or the kind of woman for me to be with," she resolves, as she rises up and says good-night in her most cordial and friendly accents.

The following day she goes back and rejoins Mrs. Withers's select circle, and Mrs. Sykes sees her no more, but reads of her

soon in the *Court Journal* as having been presented by the Marchioness of Claymore.

It is even so ; before the end of her first season, she has by her unaided talents and energy achieved the greater portion of the noble aim which she set herself to accomplish when her campaign began ! But in achieving it she has to plot and temporise, to diplomatisé and pledge herself in a very perplexing way. For the first time in his vain-glorious, self-absorbed life, Mr. Powell is experiencing what it is to have a heart, and to have that heart tortured. He has really let himself fall in love with the clever, handsome young woman who will be willing to grind him to powder beneath her steadily progressing feet, the instant she finds that she can do without him. It is through his interposition, indeed it is by reason of his earnest entreaties and incessant

importunities, that the marchioness, his sister, has spread her protecting wings over the struggling authoress.

“In justice to my brother, I must say that he very seldom asks me to ride his hobbies,” she says to her husband, “but he seems to be perfectly infatuated about this girl, and really I would rather that she married and nursed him than that he should be left to servants in his old age.”

“She’ll marry him, I’ve no doubt; as for the nursing, I would rather she left that to the servants if I were Powell; she’s rather sluggish.”

“I suppose the fact is that her mind is absorbed in her writing,” the marchioness says good-humouredly; “I am sure I should be, physically, if I were engaged upon such a vast work as she tells me she has just undertaken.”

“ What is the work ? ” the marquis asks,
“ Not another novel with the labour-question
introduced to give back-bone and muscle to
the fiction, I hope ? ”

“ No, but it’s something very erudite, and
the writing of it involves an enormous
amount of research and hard study, my
brother tells me ; that is the reason she pub-
lishes so seldom ; she really informs herself
fully on every subject on which she writes,
gets up every detail carefully, and verifies
all her facts ; on the whole I am well satis-
fied that she should marry my brother—
he might have fallen a victim to a de-
signing housekeeper by-and-by if it were
not so.”

“ Let them marry by all means, but keep
the lady as quiet as you can beforehand,”
the marquis says with a good-tempered
grace ; “ let her play the bag-pipes if she

pleases in her own glory, but you needn't help her to blow them."

"She's infinitely better than the dreaded housekeeper, and, with a little judicious handling, may be made quite presentable," the marchioness says contentedly. "She's too clever to make herself ridiculous in the same direction twice, and she will get some sharp lessons if she assumes for a moment not to need any in society's ways."

"And when society has tamed the noble savage, you think she'll marry Powell!"

"Why, of course, dear! Don't I tell you I'm resigned? she is better than the house-keeper!"

"She'll bag a boy, and make your poor deluded old brother dower her and give her away, and serve him right," the marquis says sternly.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS GARWOOD BURNS HER BOATS !

MISS GARWOOD has been sojourning for a fortnight under the exclusive roof of the Marchioness of Claymore, and as yet her visit has not been productive of all or any of the desirable results which she had anticipated would accrue from it. She has been presented, and she has been at several dinners and balls, but though the dinners and balls have been of the best, they have not been productive of pleasure to Miss Garwood. She has gone to them as a nobody, a sort of hanger-on and merely humble

family appendage of the Marchioness of Claymore's. "My brother, an elderly man who has always been rather eccentric, is a most devoted friend and admirer of Miss Garwood," her ladyship is in the habit of remarking in a casual way, when Miss Garwood's constant appearance in her train provokes remark. So it comes to be understood that Miss Garwood owes a sort of fealty to Mr. Powell, he having been the means of her occupying the proud but perilous position which she does occupy. And though he does not exact this fealty in so many words, he does exact it in an undefinable way that is very potent. Many a girl situated thus, and being actuated by no warmer feeling than a faint feeling of gladness that Mr. Powell exists to further her schemes, would find the task of rendering this eye-and-lip service revolting to a degree.

But Miss Garwood is not only exceptionally clever, she is also exceptionally sensible. She pays homage to Mr. Powell in exactly the same spirit in which, when she becomes a householder, she will pay the taxes. It has to be done ! It is in consideration of her paying this homage, and seeming to have a loving and grateful regard for the uninteresting and unlovable elderly man who is committing the folly of caring for her, that the Marchioness of Claymore is steadyng Miss Garwood's feet on society's ladder, and showing her the way to climb. "It will give her a better standing when they marry and go down to Powell's place, if it is known that she has been with me," her ladyship says in absolute confidence as to the inevitability of the marriage to which she refers. And Miss Garwood, who has an eye to the future, but not to that future which

the marchioness outlines, spares no pains to induce Mr. Powell to urge his sister on to greater efforts in her (Miss Garwood's) behalf.

It is pitiable to see the state of bondage into which she has brought him; in her rather ponderous way, she is as full of caprices as the most versatile queen of love and beauty could be. It is not desirable, according to her idea, that any clue to her current and future proceedings should be held by any one of the denizens of Mrs. Withers's admirably arranged home in Darlington Crescent. Accordingly she points out vividly to Mr. Powell that it is not seemly that a man of his standing should sojourn in a boarding-house, "for call it by what name you will it's just that and nothing more," she tells him truthfully. "Fancy you sitting down to dinner, with a half-and-half sort like Mrs. Varney," she says scornfully.

“I don’t dine there once a month, if I’m nowhere else I dine at the Club,” he expostulates; for his private rooms in Mrs. Withers’s house are luxuriously comfortable.

“But that once a month does it, it gives them the opportunity of quoting the fact against you, and saying that you can’t be in the set you say you are, or you wouldn’t be reduced to dining with Tom, Dick, and Harry in a boarding-house.”

“If they say that, their argument tells against themselves more than against me,” he persists.

“People never mind be-littling themselves a bit, for the sake of be-littling the common enemy still more.” she says, “I don’t like to hear of you there, and to know how they talk of you, and I wish you’d take chambers in some good part.”

Then he ventures to say that Mrs. Withers's house must be his abiding-place for the remainder of this season, but that next he shall hope to have the benefit of her taste in selecting a pleasant nut-shell in which they may pass a couple of months together.

She cannot put this suggestion aside and ignore it, as she has done many another. He has spoken with trembling lips, and tears in his eyes ; but, for all these signs of weakness, she sees that he is firm, and that he means to have her answer. To marry him will be altogether repugnant to her, for she has let what heart she has go out to a very different type of man during these latter days ; and though she is sufficiently sincere and in earnest about the matter to be beset by many a doubt and misgiving, she does fondly and tremulously hope that this

man has let his heart go out to her in return. At any rate he seeks her society, and appreciates her intellect, and he is in a position to do much for her aggrandisement if he pleases. With this prospect in view, it is no wonder that Mr. Powell and his suite should be specially distasteful to her. Still, she hesitates to reject it altogether ; to do so will be burning her boats, and leaving herself without the power to retrace her passage, and retrieve herself, should this other man prove a delusion and a snare. She is on very delicate ground, she knows, but still she hopes to keep her footing on it, if only she can prevail upon Mr. Powell to be patient and indefinite a little longer.

“ We will talk about next season when this one is over,” she says blithely. “ I don’t approve of taking time by the forelock in any such way. Have you finished that poem

you began last week ? I was speaking about it to Dr. Holker ; it's just the thing for him to recite, I told him—”

“ Never mind my poem. I want to live one now,” the flattering bard replies ; “ tell me, Lily, may I not ask my sister to let me relieve her of her interesting charge before the season closes ; there is no need for us to wait ? Thank Heaven ! my home is ready for my wife, and any little alterations you may wish to make in it will be made more entirely to your satisfaction, I should think, if you are on the spot to superintend them.”

He takes it quite as a matter of course that she is to be his wife. She thrills with something like shame and horror as she thinks for a moment of the hints she has made, and the half promises she has given ! Her heart sinks down as she reflects how surely the marchioness's protection and

friendship will be withdrawn from her as soon as it is known that she has rejected the marchioness's brother; and Mr. Powell *has* a place in the country, and this other man may be merely trifling with her after all!

She has come rapidly to this conclusion, she has surrendered her hand into his keeping, and has begun, saying,

“Mr. Powell, I've thought all along that your great goodness and kindness to me was merely the outcome of the generous spirit of sympathy you have for every struggling artist——” when she hears the familiar rumble of a familiar brougham at the door. There is but one visitor who may come to the marchioness at this early hour, and that is Dr. Holker, the fortunate fashionable physician, who has one of the most remunerative practices, and one of the most æsthetic residences in town. His morning

visits have been paid to Miss Garwood lately, for she has coughed once or twice in his hearing, and forthwith he has insisted upon attending her. "Her health is too precious to literature, to society, and to her friends, to be trifled with," he says, and Lily has submitted to being treated like an invalid in theory for his sake.

She blesses the interruption which checks the utterance of the words that would bind her irrevocably to Mr. Powell, and substitutes another form of words for those of acceptance which she would have spoken, had not the brougham rumbled up at the moment.

"I am so taken by surprise that I can't express my gratitude for your noble offer properly; it's like you to try to do good for a young girl, who's almost unprotected, even at the cost of your own feelings; but I'm not

going to let you sacrifice yourself; a wife would be an incumbrance to you, but your friendship I shall always prize beyond everything."

"Lily, you're joking! You *know* I love you," he says with quivering lips. "I am old, older much than you, I admit—but——"

"Dr. Holker, for Miss Garwood," a servant says, throwing open the door, and Lily is safe for this morning.

If only Mr. Powell would retreat and give them the opportunity, she feels sure that this handsome, prosperous, polished Doctor would say the sweet words that would make her supremely happy. But Mr. Powell is human, and so feeling that his own chance is bad, he cannot bring himself to do aught that may better the position of a rival. It is a bitter blow to the old gentleman that

this girl whom he has sought to raise from social obscurity should be indifferent to his love, and the glorious vista his love could open out for her. He feels much as King Cophetua would have felt if the beggar-maid had thanked him kindly, but declared her intention of wedding his young foot-page. Instinctively he feels that this younger, more fluent man is his rival, and a feeling of anger against Lily takes possession of his heart. “How can she have dared to accept the many favours he has shown her, if she has not intended to make him full payment for them!” He almost hates her at this moment; jealousy makes him bitter and mean! “I overlooked her vulgar surroundings and low extraction, and would have taken her into *my* family, and made her own sink out of her memory altogether; and this is my reward! She is ready to throw

me over for the sake of a modern man who will value her exactly in proportion to the literary success she makes." Then an accession of softer feeling sets in, and he clings to his place in the room, and yearns for a kind glance after the old pattern from the young lady who is now giving the suave and gentle physician the full benefit of the grand grey eyes that have enslaved Mr. Powell's heart, and sapped his judgment.

Dr. Holker stays on and on. His visit far exceeds the limits allowed to the ordinary friendly morning call; nevertheless, Mr. Powell outstays him. If Holker is to triumph, it shall not be immediately after his (Powell's) downfall. There shall be an interval. She shall have time to ponder over and partially realise what she has lost.

Presently the luncheon-gong sounds, and

Mr. Powell has the advantage. Dr. Holker cannot invite himself, and Miss Garwood does not dare to invite him. Consequently he takes a lingering reluctant leave, which speaks volumes to Lily's expectant heart, and coy Phillis is alone with her ancient Corydon again.

“Lily!” he says, detaining her for a minute, as she seems about to leave the room, “you shall have everything your own way; the way I live in town gives you no idea of my position in the country. My sister's friendship is yours already, but as *your* sister she can do more, much more, than she has done hitherto, you won't decide against me hastily?”

“Every word you say makes me feel that it's your kindness, and not your heart, that speaks,” she says, getting away to the door. Then, when she has opened it, she

adds, "So we'll say nothing about this to any one, Mr. Powell, and when I'm married—as I hope to be soon—I'll ask you to give me away, and you'll have greater pleasure in doing that, I'm sure, than in marrying me yourself."

In his amazement he cannot detain her, so she quietly walks down to luncheon, having burnt her boats behind her.

Boldly and well does she play her game for the greater part of a week, during which time she is in uncertainty about Dr. Holker. The marchioness is not annoyed about her brother's repulsion, nor is she affectionately sorry for him. But she is disappointed that he has failed to procure the services of a nurse, house-keeper, and companion, who would have been unable to leave him at a moment's notice whenever he chanced to be extra exacting or disagreeable.

She expects Miss Garwood to leave, evidently, now that the Powell marriage bubble has burst; but Lily is pachydermous where her interests are concerned, and it is her interest to remain on with the marchioness until Dr. Holker has spoken the decisive words. Meanwhile she carefully collects and repeats to him, all the favourable prophecies that are uttered and written about her forthcoming work.

Providence helps those who are unceasing, unresting, in helping themselves. She phrases a few words so aptly on one occasion to a young and rising politician, on the strike and labour question, that he avails himself of them the next night, in the course of a florid speech in the House. Lily finds this jewel of her own imbedded in the rough gold of his sentences, and calls him, half

playfully but very adroitly, to credit her with the authorship of it, when next they meet in the presence of Dr. Holker. She is quoted, cited, talked about more and more favourably than she has ever been before ; and Dr. Holker kicks the beam finally in her favour, by proposing to marry her before the end of this her first successful season.

As Mrs. Holker, the presiding genius of a house that is the head-centre of all that is worth meeting in Art, Literature, and Science in London, we may meet her again ere long. But as she is given away at the altar by Mr. Powell (she has persuaded him to publish, and has reviewed his poems in several places most flatteringly), we see the last of the Lily Garwood who has been our companion during the season.

A GOOD SETTLEMENT.



A GOOD SETTLEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

“NOW DONALD'S AT THE DOOR.”

THINGS had been going very badly with us for two or three years, when our family misfortunes appeared to me to culminate in my sister Harriet's engagement to Stephen Malling.

I had nothing to urge against Mr. Malling personally, professionally, or morally. He was a good-looking man, on the fair side of middle-age; he was land-agent or steward to an unexceptionable nobleman, at an even

more unexceptionable salary. He stood well with his peers in the neighbourhood, with his patrons, with the vicar himself, but above all with my sister Harriet—"little Harty," as I had always called her. Was I not bound to be grateful to him and glad of him as a safe and solvent addition to our rickety and insolvent house?

For really, in spite of the appearances we still managed to keep up, we were in dismal straits very often down in that dear old manor-house which had been ours and our forefathers' since we became a race. We were well "beliked" in that country side, for we were not prosperous enough to be envied, and not so pitifully poor that people deemed it desirable to shun us.

Nevertheless we *were* in very dismal straits for want of that hard cash which we all had the habit of spending as freely as if

we possessed it in superfluity. But this strait, which seemed to make it a necessity that our little Harty should marry Mr. Malling, was the hardest through which I had been called to pass.

We had been told of his offer for Harty's hand one evening, just after we had been informed that the family finances would not admit of our going to the archery ball—the only ball worth going to in the neighbourhood.

Lady Doynethorpe, the fair young countess whose husband, the earl, was Mr. Malling's patron, had driven over to the manor-house, and specially begged that we "might be there." But awkward ungainly poverty interposed between us and our desire.

"We haven't the ready-money to give you ball-dresses in these days, darlings,"

my mother said, pityingly, “ and our credit is gone, so till you marry you must be home birds.”

Then, just after she had made this announcement to us, and we had received it dutifully, my father came in, and, with an air of relief, said Malling wanted to marry Harty.

“ He’s a good fellow—a thoroughly good straight - forward noble - hearted fellow,” my father went on, with the enthusiasm a person who knows nothing really in favour of his subject is apt to display about it.

“ Will you take this paragon ? Will you pick up this first handkerchief that is thrown to you ? Will you contentedly settle down into such a very middle-class groove, Harty ? ” I cried, reproachfully, for I had invested all my pride in my sister, and pride

was a quality in which we Luttrells were never deficient.

"Will you hold your tongue and not make an affectionate goose of yourself, Laura?" Harty replied, good-humouredly. "Mr. Malling is rather well inclined towards you at present, but if he hear how strongly you are in opposition to his scheme he won't like you quite so well."

"That's just what it is—a 'scheme'!"—I interrupted, eagerly. "Can't you see it? Don't you feel it?"

"I could be lenient to any man who schemed to make me his wife," she answered, proudly; "and he has done it so very openly and honourably, as papa says, that I shall put him out of suspense by saying 'yes' at once."

"He's waiting for you in the library," my father said. Then he added, hurriedly,

“Don’t let our circumstances weigh with you in this matter, my child; there are harder things than poverty to endure. Don’t let the dread of it influence you unduly.”

She paused at the door on her way to her lover, and I could see that she was strongly moved by conflicting emotions.

“*Are* there worse things than poverty to endure in this world, where poverty is a blunder and a crime?” she said, sadly. “I think, ten minutes ago, when poverty compelled us to turn a deaf ear to Lady Doynethorpe’s polite desire that we should go to the archery ball, poverty seemed as terrible to Laura as to me.”

“If you marry for the sake of ball dresses,” I was beginning, impatiently, but Harty put her hands to her ears and fled to her fate.

For a long time I could not get over my dislike to and distrust of my brother-in-law. He did nothing to justify either feeling, but I suffered them both to grow upon me until it became an openly understood thing in our circle that I had assumed not only an attitude of isolation but of actual antagonism to him. There was something in his cold reserved manner that filled me with inward dread. And his conduct was so flawless the whole time that the dread was made to appear a most utterly ridiculous thing.

"Will you ever condescend to come to my house when Stephen is at home?" Harty said to me the day before her marriage, "or must I shuffle my husband out of the way when my sister comes to see me?"

"I'll come on market days and have you all to myself," I said, evasively. "You

know I've always declared that nothing should ever induce me to infest a brother-in-law's house."

"In the old days, when Donald was here, you didn't say that," she murmured. And I, remembering Donald Stuart well, and seeing that she remembered him too, felt my whole soul revolt against the Malling alliance.

It came off, though, in due time, despite all those vague alarms which Harty laughingly declared were born of jealousy and loyalty to Donald, and when I was pressing my parting kiss upon my sister's cheek Stephen Malling held out a luxuriant olive branch to me well in sight of the whole family.

"You must give me a little of the same generous love you lavish so freely on our Harty, and let me be a brother indeed to

you, Laura," he said, earnestly, and in my softened and subdued mood I felt sorry that his insincerity was so apparent to me.

"God bless the child and make her contented with her lot," my mother said, tearfully, as the carriage containing the happy pair drove out of sight.

"That's not a very enthusiastic aspiration, my dear," my father remarked. "Considering all things, Harty ought to feel more than contentment at having contracted such a sensible marriage; he has made a good settlement upon her. If he should die she will be amply provided for, and if he live she will be a rich woman."

"A rich man's wife, perhaps," I put in, grudgingly, "but never anything but poor and much-to-be-pitied Harty in my eyes. His past is too carefully locked up, and his present is too guarded and blameless for me

ever to like him or for Harty ever to be happy."

"If it amuses you to prophesy evil things about your sister, don't seek to give me a share in the entertainment," my father said, in a jesting manner, that was assumed to cover a good deal of genuine annoyance. And my mother looked at me with imploring eyes, for Harty had been an expensive luxury in our impecunious household, and it was naturally painful to those in responsibility to hear cavilling mention made of the manner of her removal.

When the orthodox honeymoon had waxed and waned Mr. Malling brought his wife home, and the neighbourhood received her faultlessly as the daughter of an old line and the wife of a man of the most eminent respectability. She had altered a little more than I had expected to find her after

one short month's absence, but she was my own dear pet loving sister still, and our reunion was very pleasant, in spite of the dread I had of Mr. Malling's coming in and finding me domesticated on his hearth.

We had had our gossip out comfortably, and she had shown me the numerous beauties and conveniences of her establishment without one word being said on either side about the obnoxious master of it. But just as I was going to leave her she said, with an effort and a blush,

"Why won't you ask for Stephen, Laura? One would think it hurt you to speak his name."

"Somehow or other his name doesn't fall trippingly from my tongue, does it?" I replied, laughingly. "But of course he's well or you would have told me; and,

Harty, don't set him more against me by telling him of my remissness."

She looked up startled and inquiringly, for I had thrown a good deal of energy into my request.

" You don't think he would take it as an excuse for separating me from you, do you, Laura? Oh! dear, don't tell me that you think *that*—it would be too hard."

" Do you think it—do you fear it yourself," I asked, suddenly.

" No—no—no, not exactly, that is—but one gets to think and fear all sorts of things when—"

She paused abruptly, and I asked,

" When what, dear ? "

" When a man silences you as Stephen does. Do you know, Laura, I'm afraid to think a single question about his past life, much more to ask it. That house that he

has settled on me on the border of those dreary marshes has been his home, I know, but how he lived there and who lived there with him is more than I can tell."

"Tell me about the house. Is it your own—your very own?" I exclaimed. "Is it pretty and well furnished? Is it let or empty? Tell me, Harty."

"It's my very own, to do as I like with—at least no, not to do as I like with, for I must neither sell it nor let it, nor hire my own servants for it when I go there to stay. It's beautifully got up—everything handsome and subdued—*real* oak floors and wainscot, *real* old Chippendale chairs and buffets, *real* old bottle-green glass windows, that let in a dim religious light upon everything, and—*real* gloom."

She muttered the last word in a low voice, and looked round uneasily as she muttered

it, as if she expected to see her husband effecting a noiseless entrance into the room.

"It has a pretty name—Marshlands," she went on. "'Mrs. Malling, Marshlands,' looks rather well on my card. I wonder Stephen liked to give up the position he must have had as the owner of it to come here and be merely Lord Doynethorpe's steward."

Then we drifted away from what seemed to me a gruesome topic and talked about our friends the Doynethorpes, and I made mention of a certain young cousin of her ladyship's, called Donald.

Gradually it came about that I was nearly always with my sister, in spite of that well-marked aversion of mine to infesting a brother-in-law's house. Harty, rebounding from the stiff and austere home-life she led in all honour and respectability, sought relief

in every form of festivity that took place in our country-side, and I was needful to her, for she made the business of chaperoning me her excuse for being out so perpetually.

Gradually, too, it came to pass that the husband and wife, never closely bound together in reality, were more and more sundered in seeming.

He silenced her so effectually by his depressing manner and dispiriting habit of never appearing to wish to be happy, that she ceased to hold any converse with him, and openly showed that she shrank from and feared him. But it was "a good settlement" that she had made in marrying him, everybody agreed, for he was liberal to a degree to her in money matters, and it was known so well that we realised what it was to want money.

How pretty she was in those early married days, prettier far as a young matron even than she had been as a girl. Pretty and fascinating, without reproach and above suspicion, and withal so terribly afraid of the husband who had gained in social status and lost nought by his marriage with her. How pretty she was and how terribly her beauty frightened me when Lady Doyne-thorpe said to me one day,

“What will my cousin Donald say to it all, I wonder, when he comes back, next week? You know he *is* coming back, don’t you?”

“No—but don’t let him come!” I exclaimed, with injudicious energy. “As things have turned out since he was here last it’s better he should not figure on our canvas again.”

“You talk nonsense, my dear, because

you exaggerate Harty's claims to preserving her place in a man's memory after having done her best to forfeit it. Dear Donald ! Why shouldn't he come ? He shall come and see her as she is—a very well satisfied Mrs. Malling—and when he has had his silly moan out over that delusion he shall turn to you, you charming reality, and make you my beloved cousin-in-law."

" You're very good, and of course I'm much flattered and gratified by the prospect," I laughed, " but at the same time I take leave to doubt that I could ever erase Harty from any man's mind, especially from Donald's, so I still think that you had better not let him come."

" Malling isn't an Othello."

" No, not a vulgar Othello—her life is safe enough in his hands, but he may teach

her in time to smother her real self and live on—an unhappy sham."

Bright Lady Doynethorpe gave a derisive shudder as I spoke.

"He can never be anything but hopelessly, uninterestingly mediocre," she laughed. "Don't try to cast a melodramatic halo about him. Poor Harty! Why shouldn't she have a gleam of brightness in that mud-coloured married life of hers, even if it is shed by an old lover?"

"For mercy's sake never let Mr. Malling hear of Donald Stuart as that!" I gasped, and her ladyship laughed and said that I was bent on surrounding Mr. Malling with an atmosphere of mystery and mischief which he had not merited.

The first intimation my sister had of the return of the man who had never declared himself her lover, though he had very openly

showed his love, was given to her by me. I had resolutely avoided the topic, deeming it a dangerous one while there was even a remote probability of Donald's staying away. But at last I heard from Lady Doynethorpe that he had actually arrived at Thorpe Hall, and had announced his intention of renewing friendly relations with the Luttrells at once. Now we were the Luttrells, and Harty was one of us still, though she was married. Silence on the subject would throw a veil of mystery over it that would be far more dangerous now than the most open discussion, I decided. And so, as soon as I went into Stephen Malling's house that morning, and saw his wife roving about the rooms and regulating and ordering all things with the delicacy and taste of a woman to whom home is a pleasant place, I gave out my news.

“ Donald Stuart is staying at Thorpe again, Harty. I wonder if Lady Doyne-thorpe will make his presence the excuse for a good deal of gaiety ? ”

“ I hope she will,” Harty said facing round upon me with a suddenness that surprised me. For I had selected the moment when her back was towards me as the most fitting in which to tell her the startling news.

“ I hope she will. Donald is such a fine excuse for any amount of gaiety and pleasure. I must have a dinner for him and a garden party. Last year we couldn’t show him any hospitality at the manor-house because we were trying to retrench, you know ; but now I can show him that it’s the Luttrells’ will to be liberal and hospitable whenever they have the means.”

She seemed so entirely to have put aside

all remembrance of Donald Stuart as a former lover, and to be regarding him so entirely as an object on whom she was socially bound to exercise the virtue of hospitality, that I felt ashamed of my half-formed doubts and fears. Nevertheless I ventured to suggest—

“ You have never asked the Doynethorpes to dine with you yet, Harty ; don’t you think it will be a little remarkable your doing so directly Donald Stuart is with them ? ”

“ It will look as if I had never cared very much about having them, and am very desirous of welcoming him, and that is exactly how the case stands.”

“ Let me see—he and Stephen were not very intimate, were they ? ” I went on, with an air of hypocritical forgetfulness, for I knew perfectly well that Stephen had found himself unable to exercise Christian

forbearance and patience when Donald's popularity had been our theme at the Manor House. But if Harty chose to forget this prejudice of her husband's I should be unwise, I deemed, to remind her of it. Nevertheless, though I held my peace, my heart misgave me when presently I heard her half-humming, half-singing a verse of the old Scottish song, "There's nae luck aboot the house :"

" Is this a time for ye to wark,
Now Donald's at the door ? "

uttering his name lingeringly, as though she loved it.

CHAPTER II.

IN ORDER OF PRECEDENCE.

DONALD STUART paid us his promised visit at the Manor House the next day, and I and my mother found ourselves putting our company manners on to the man who we had both hoped to see Harty's husband. But the young man showed more tact than we did, and insisted on being most happily free and unconstrained with us.

“And I have to congratulate you on the marriage of your second daughter, Mrs. Luttrel,” he said, with no sentimental shirking of a subject that we were justified in

supposing must be very painful to him. “Doynethorpe tells me that Malling is a first-rate fellow, and my cousin Florence adds that Mrs. Malling has one of the most charming houses in the neighbourhood.”

“A nice comfortable home, not at all a pretentious place,” my mother interrupted, nervously. “Marshlands, in Essex, is to be their ultimate home.”

“Marshlands, did you say?” he asked, with a quick surprise, that drew from me the unwise remark—

“Yes. Do you know anything of it? It’s settled on Harty, that is the reason why I am curious about it.”

“Settled on your sister, is it? Oh, then it can’t be the place I was thinking of at the moment—in fact, I believe I made a mistake in the name. I must have done so, indeed.”

He was so evidently anxious to get away from this subject, and to disclaim all knowledge of Marshlands, that I felt convinced at once that he was not mistaken at all, and that he knew something greatly to its disadvantage. However, he persistently foiled my endeavours to elicit any further information from him, and presently went away, leaving me very curious and a little unhappy.

I had no opportunity of telling Harty of this occurrence for several days, for Mr. Malling suddenly became so unremitting in his attendance on her that he would scarcely leave her for an hour, and invariably remained in the room when I went to see her. As I disliked and distrusted him, as I knew that his line of conduct was dictated by the narrowest and most selfish jealousy, I rebelled with all my soul against this

espionage, and opened my mind wide, to let every hitherto lulled suspicion that might be lurking about enter in.

It was not until the night of the dinner to the Doynethorpes that I was able to say to Harty,

“I think you’ll find, if you question him judiciously, that Donald Stuart can tell you more about Marshlands than you have heard from Mr. Malling.”

“I don’t suppose that he can tell me anything that I should care to know,” she answered rather drearily. “I shall find out its advantages and disadvantages quite soon enough from experience, for Stephen told me to-day that he intends we shall spend the autumn there.”

“Will he give up his work here?”

“Not nominally ; virtually, you know, the land has been out of his hands for some time.

He will come over once a month and audit accounts and hear complaints."

"Will he farm at Marshlands?"

"No," she said, with a shiver, "that's the worst of it. He'll be in the house all day—all the year round. I should be glad to get into a new neighbourhood if it were not for that—glad to get away from the Doynethorpes, and every one here, in fact."

"Not glad to get away from me," I said, putting my arms round her and kissing her, and she clung to me, whispering,

"Oh, Laura, if Stephen and you had only been better friends I should ask him now to let me take you to Marshlands, but as it is—"

"As it is, I'll ask him," I said, bravely enough, for Stephen Malling was not by at the time to quell me with that lowering

depressing manner of his which always had the effect upon me of making me feel that in some way or other I was in the wrong.

“No, Laura, don’t,” she exclaimed, impatiently. “Oh ! dear, don’t you see that anything like interference on your part makes things worse for me ? He was like a grizzly bear yesterday to me because Donald Stuart told him my pony was not properly broken for a lady to drive ; if you propose going as guardian angel with me to Marshlands he’ll make me miserable — more miserable than he has made me yet.”

“Poor little Harty !” I said, with sudden irrepressible pity, and I saw she kept back with difficulty the tears that the futile sympathy called forth.

It was the most dreadful dinner-party at which I was ever present, for the gloom of the host diffused itself over everyone but

Donald, and there was something almost garish in his gaiety by comparison with the others. He, as Lady Doynethorpe's cousin, had been told off in order of precedence to take my mother in to dinner, and it seemed to me that Mr. Malling had taken extraordinary care to put Donald as far away from both Harty and me as was possible. It might have been fancy on my part, but it also seemed to me that Mr. Malling looked grimly gratified when he saw my chagrin at the arrangement. At any rate I had the feeling of being spited and baffled by him, and I made up my mind from that moment to find out all there might be to be found out about Marshlands.

Harty was kept at the piano playing accompaniments for me, and singing nearly the whole evening, for the Doynethorpes delighted in hearing her sweet young voice,

and her husband was proud of the results of the training and cultivation he had bestowed upon it. She had learnt from him in fear and not in love, but that mattered little. He had taught her well and was proud of his pupil.

“ From whom could he have learnt singing himself? He has taught Harty more than she ever learnt from any of her masters, and he manages that unpleasant voice of his with perfect taste; isn’t it odd, and he merely a farmer ? ”

I found myself making this speech to Donald Stuart, as we listened to the last few bars of a song that was being very exquisitely rendered by Mr. Malling. I had heard the same song from other lips several times, but I must do my disliked brother-in-law the justice of owning that his faultless phrasing gave real pathos to the common-

place words in which a woman is supposed to sing of a love that lives still, and a future in which she fears she will be left.

“ You call me true and tender names,
And gently smooth my tresses,
And all the while my happy heart
Beats time to your caresses.
You love me in your tender way,
I answer as you let me ;
But, oh ! there comes another day,
The day when you'll forget me.

“ I know that every passing hour
Is filled with thoughts I bring you ;
I know there is a subtle power
In those sweet songs I sing you.
I do not fear the darkest way
With those dear arms about me ;
Ah ! no, I only dread the day
When you can do without me.”

“ Where can he have learnt to sing that song as I thought only one person in the world could sing it ? ” Donald Stuart said, in reply to me, as the last passionately plain-

tive tones died out in such haunting harmony that we literally held our breath to hear it. And then, somehow or other, we were all gathered into a group, and each one of us was extolling either the song or the singer of it.

“It’s bewitchingly—too tenderly—sweet,” Lady Doynethorpe said. “Why have you never given us the treat of hearing it before, Mr. Malling? It’s quite new to me—is it published?”

“No—but I have the music of it,” Donald Stuart interposed, eagerly; “don’t you remember when I came back from New York three years ago, Florence, I told you I had lost my heart on the voyage to a lovely young American lady? *She* gave me the music and the words, written out by herself, and she used to sing it as well as you do,

and quite with your style," he added, abruptly, turning to Stephen Malling.

His words produced a little panic of awkwardness among us all, that was quite out of proportion to their importance, it appeared. We all ceased speaking and stood gazing in silent expectation of some sort of explanation of the coincidence from Mr. Malling. After a very short pause he gave it, leaving us still more puzzled than before.

"I learnt the words, music, and 'style,' as you call it, from the lady you mention; it is singular that you should have known and admired *her, too*, Mr. Stuart."

He emphasized the words "her, too," so strongly as to make them almost offensive, especially as he glanced from Donald to my sister while uttering them. But we were all cowed by the dark secretive manner of the man, and so even gallant daring Donald

Stuart suffered the imputation to pass unquestioned.

“I don’t like your brother-in-law, Miss Luttrel,” he said to me a few days after this dinner. “He cut me off from all communication with both you and Mrs Malling by handing me over to your mamma, who didn’t want me, and who would much rather have been consigned to her old friend the vicar; and he caught up my reference to the young American lady, with whom I voyaged across the herring pond some years ago, in a way that seemed to throw us all out of gear.”

“He has been throwing us all out of gear ever since he came into the family,” I said pettishly. “Why Harty lets him arrange her dinner-parties and work his dismal will in every domestic department I can’t imagine. She used to be ever so much more defiant



than I am, but we seem to have changed characters since her marriage."

"He doesn't ill-treat her, does he?" Donald said, looking at me uneasily. "She is changed a good deal from the brilliant girl who made my last visit to Thorpe a never-to-be-forgotten experience, but it can't have come to that—that he ill-treats her."

"A rougher woman might find little cause for suffering in his treatment of her," I said, discontentedly; "but Harty is a sensitive plant, and when he jars upon her and thwarts her, and generally makes her feel that she is in his power, she suffers."

"And now he is going to take her away to that place of his down on the marshes. The Doynethorpes were lamenting the project to-day, and saying they hoped you were going to look after her and help her to bear her exile."

“The Doynethorpes would never think of saying such a thing, Mr. Stuart ; that is your own sentiment, not theirs. Now, tell me why you think my sister needs some other protector than her husband ?”

“Do you not say yourself that ‘he jars upon and thwarts her’ ?”

“He does. I’ll be frank with you ; he is a cowardly tyrant, for he galls her daily, hourly, and yet gives her no fair excuse for breaking her fetters ; now, be as frank with me, and tell me all you know of Marshlands.”

“I only know this, that some time ago—it may be two years or a little more—a man went to live at Marshlands with his wife—a quiet, dark, mysterious, stand-off sort of fellow. Well, they were seen a few times driving and walking about together, and then suddenly the lady disappeared in a



manner for which the servants could not account—she had been and was not, that's all that they knew. Her husband—Spalding he called himself—took the matter very coolly. 'She was an eccentric woman,' he said, 'loved her liberty, and would not have her goings ordered by any man, or her plans commented upon by any *côterie*.' However, as you may suppose, people would comment upon the affair very freely, and all kinds of stories got about. Some said she wasn't his wife at all, and that he had no legal right to gainsay her going; others thought that there was even a darker reason for her disappearance altogether. There was enough said about Marshlands at that time to make me feel very sorry when I heard it mentioned as your sister's future home."

"Tell this to papa," I exclaimed. If Mr. Malling has changed his name to disguise

his former personality there must be good cause for papa to be on the alert in Harty's interests."

" My dear Miss Luttrel, I never associated the two names with the one individual until you said that ; but your intuitive fear has let a flood of light in upon my mind—Stephen Malling is the man who passed as Spalding in the Marshlands district ! "

" Can't we get hold of people who knew him ? Can't we prove something—what, Heaven alone knows—against him ? Can't we save my sister ? " I cried, impetuously. " If she should go alone to this horrible place with him she will die or disappear ; between us we can surely save her ? "

" Go with her and it will be all right ; he must feel that you suspect him, and will never dare do anything to excite your further suspicions."



“It is easy to say ‘go,’ but he won’t let her invite me.”

“Invite yourself.”

“And be an unwelcome guest in my sister’s house! Well, I’d bear even worse than that for Harty’s sake.”

“You’re a noble girl,” he exclaimed, starting; “by Jove, when one meets with such ‘stuff’ as there is in you, in a woman, one feels that it is only right and fitting that she should have the sway in the world which history credits her with.”

“Which ‘romance’ credits her with, if you like,” I reasoned, but I was touched by his compliment, and was more alive than I had ever been before to the manifold good qualities and charms of my sister’s former lover.

“I have some old aunts living a mile or two from Marshlands, and I mean to be with

them a good deal for the winter months. I'll give you my address, and if you ever need me send for me."

"I think I shall need you before these winter months are over," I answered, meditatively; "dark days are in store for us, I feel. I wonder can any woman ever have sung those words, 'I do not fear the darkest way with those dear arms about me,' to Stephen Malling?"

He shook his head, as if the attempt to solve that problem was quite beyond him, and then took his leave, with this parting injunction—

"Above all things stay by your sister while he keeps her at Marshlands."

"It's a pity that the law of precedence prevented you having your gossip out with young Stuart at my dinner-table the other day, Laura," Stephen Malling said, coming

in a few minutes after Donald's departure ; he's been here more than an hour, that stable boy I sent your father the other day tells me."

" How does he dare to talk, and why should you question our servants, Stephen ? "

" Your servants, my dear girl—your father condescends to allow me to pay the boy's wages, surely I may venture to make a remark to him in return."

" Oh, Harty ! and this is the good settlement you have made ; your husband taunts us with our paltry pecuniary obligations to him, and you are going into exile at the risk of your happiness—your life ! "

These were the thoughts that filled my mind respecting the man who held my sister in the hollow of his hand. But I need scarcely say that, as I wanted this man to

“He wants you to learn to rely entirely upon him,” I said, and in my heart I vowed that Harty should not be left to fight the battle of life alone and unprotected at Marshlands. Notwithstanding this vow, it was clearly understood that I was not to be their guest when she finally left us.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE LIBRARY.

Two months passed away, and still I was not given the opportunity for which I pined—the opportunity of rejoining and watching over my sister. Her letters, too, were short, infrequent, and stilted in style, to a degree that made me surmise that Mr. Malling had supervised their composition.

“We can’t get hold of Harty as she is, at all, can we ? ” my mother would sometimes say to me, wistfully. But my father, whom poverty was pinching sharply, as usual, still averred that his “second daughter had made

a right good match, and that Malling was an excellent fellow."

Once I heard from Donald Stuart, just a few lines, enclosed in a letter to his cousin—

"**MY DEAR MISS LUTTREL**,—Though I am staying with my aunts, who know everybody, and live within two miles of Marshlands, I can tell you nothing of the Mallings; it is given out that the lady 'loves seclusion,' and that he, in deference to her wishes, leads a quiet life! Is not this love of seclusion a new thing? Charge me with some mission that will justify me in calling, and glean something that may relieve your anxiety.

"Yours truly,

"**DONALD STUART.**"



“What mysterious romance have Donald and you been concocting together?” Lady Doynethorpe, to whom I showed the letter, at once asked me.

I told her all I knew, hinted that I suspected a great deal more, and succeeded in thoroughly impregnating her with my fears and alarms about Harty. Greatly to my delight, and a little to my surprise, the confidence made her my coadjutor at once.

“Donald’s aunts are mine too; I’ll go and stay a day or two with them, and effect an entrance into Marshlands. While Mr. Malling is my lord’s trusted agent there can be nothing out of the way in an impromptu call on Mrs. Malling from my lady,” she said, animatedly.

“You’re more than good and kind, but yours will be but a superficial glance, I began, hesitatingly.

“Trust me to find out something, though, if there’s anything to be found out—trust me to find a means of getting *you* there.”

Inspired by her confidence I waited with what was almost patience, for another fortnight, doing the best I could all the while to soothe my poor mother. At the end of that fortnight Lady Doynethorpe came to us.

“I’ve been to the dear old aunts, and I’ve called at Marshlands, but Mrs. Malling denied herself to me !”

“Impossible !”

“Well, the refusal to admit me was given in her name. ‘Mrs. Malling regrets that the state of her health will not permit her to see anyone,’ was the message brought out by an austere-looking maid-servant. And though I felt the message was not sent by Harty I could not fight my way into the house in the face of it, could I ?”

We agreed that she could not well have done so, and then I suppose my disappointment at the results of her diplomacy was very patent to her, for she said,

“ Dear Laura, don’t cry—I have a plan to propose. You are clever enough to carry it out if you try, and I believe it is the only way in which you’ll ever get into your brother-in-law’s house.”

“ If Laura is to get into *her sister’s* house by a *ruse* I would rather she never went there at all,” my mother said, proudly ignoring Mr. Malling very prettily but rather inconsistently withal, since he was the one whose will had to be considered chiefly. But we put aside the dear lady’s objections and forced her into being a member of the cabal.

This, in a few words, was Lady Doyne-thorpe’s scheme.

My sister, Mrs. Malling, was advertising for a maid, and stipulating that the maid should not be of the Marshlands neighbourhood. The maid's duties would be light.

She was to wait entirely on her lady and have a sitting-room to herself, which would be attended to by the under-housemaid. "There would be no collision with the kitchen, apparently," Lady Doynethorpe said, suggestively, and I replied,

"Are you thinking I might take the place?"

"Yes, Laura—you're a capital actress, as we all know, and have the art of 'make up' at your fingers' ends; why not play the part of lady-help to your sister, and satisfy yourself once for all as to whether or not she is a free agent and a happy woman?"

Her arguments prevailed eventually with my mother, whose dislike to this course of

evil that good might come was at first very strong. As for my father, he contemplated my lengthened absence from home with equanimity when he heard that I was going to stay with a friend of Lady Doynethorpe's on remunerative terms, while for my own part I candidly confess I rejoiced in the enterprise for love not only of my sister but of adventure's sake.

To cut this part of my story short, it is enough to say that I answered the advertisement for a "maid to be the sole attendant of a young married lady" so satisfactorily that Mr. Malling apparently saw no reason to distrust my capability for entering upon the duties of the situation, and consequently engaged me.

"You must never forget yourself and never be *yourself* for an instant, Laura," was Lady Doynethorpe's parting injunction to

me. “I’ll go down there again and make *him* see me, at any rate, and then I’ll insinuate that I don’t like the maid he has engaged for his wife, and beg him to let me find a substitute for her—that’s the policy to employ with him.”

“Don’t try too much ‘delicate contrivance’ till I’m established,” I rejoined, and then once more I questioned her nervously as to my make-up, and felt only half assured when she declared it to be a most efficient disguise.

Even while our scheme was in its infancy we had come to the conclusion that it would be unsafe to let Harty know anything about it. And now that it was fully ripened, hers were the perceptive powers that we feared the most.

“I can defy Mr. Malling at all points, I’m sure,” I said. “If he suspects me it will be

easy for me to bother and beguile him into a state of bewilderment, but if I see Harty unhappy, yearning for her mother and sister, then it will be hard work to control myself."

" You *must* control yourself if you want to do good, and you *can* control yourself if you have a sufficient motive for doing so—I have Donald's authority for saying that of you, Laura."

" Does Donald look upon me as being anything besides a mere instrument in the machinery which is being set at work for Harty's good ? " I retorted, in rather piqued tones ; for though I would have given my life for my sister, it did hurt me a little that Donald should take it so entirely for granted that I should be sacrificed without demur.

" Why, Donald *esteems* you more than he does anyone in the world," Lady Doyne-

thorpe replied, her eyes wide with amazement. "Of course your devotion to Harty has touched him immensely. I couldn't help telling him the other day that it was no wonder women valued beauty beyond everything, when it is daily pointed out to us how prettiness carries the day over mere goodness and usefulness. Now, here's a case in point. Harty, the Luttrel beauty, is in a dilemma which, excuse me, she brought entirely upon herself; and you—the clever useful sister—are ready to do all sorts of unpleasant things in order to get her out of it. No wonder Donald thinks you a pearl among women—a treasure beyond compare."

When I heard that Donald thought these things I took fresh heart of grace, and went down to Marshlands determining to deserve the good opinion he had formed of me—not



that I had any desire beyond the hope of helping my sister in the matter.

I reached Marshlands about four o'clock in the afternoon, and in the character of her new maid I was at once shown up to my lady's dressing-room, that she might inspect me and give her orders for the evening.

I nearly broke down and forgot my part when I saw Harty. She was sitting in an arm-chair by the window, looking ill at ease, and more than half-expectant of something disagreeable happening.

As I advanced into the room she seemed to me to look beyond me rather than at me.

“ Is Mr. Malling coming up? Have you seen him? ” she inquired, anxiously, and I replied, in the deep low monotone I had adopted to deceive her—

“ I have not seen Mr. Malling, madam. Shall I send for him? ”

"No—no—no—I don't want him," she replied, irritably, "only I'm nervous, and I fancied he was behind you. Shut the door and come and talk to me. I've had no one to speak to for the last three months, and I'm getting frightened at the sound of my own voice."

I longed to run forward, betray myself, and clasp her to my heart, but I was restrained by the reflection that she was thoroughly in subjection and that she would infallibly betray us all to her stern lord and master. Accordingly I went forward, without making a sign, and submitted myself to the crucial test of letting the light fall fully upon me.

Ah! but I *was* well made up. I rejoiced in my own cleverness and skill.

After gazing at me steadfastly for a few moments she heaved a sigh of disappointment, and said,



“For an instant you reminded me of someone, but the likeness goes as I look at you. What part of the country do you come from?”

I made a shot at a name in a part of the country of which she knew nothing.

“*Dalverton, in Somersetshire,*” I said, boldly.

“Ah! that’s one of the fair smiling western districts. How could you ever make up your mind to come to such a dreary place as this? It’s all marsh and miasma, and blank flatness and chilling fog here, and I hate it!”

She turned wearily and looked out of the window as she spoke—looked out over the flat uninteresting expanse of creek-intersected marsh, as if she longed to escape across it to the wide sea that lay beyond. And I dared not tell her that she had a friend nearer to her than the cold ocean.

“I’ve no doubt but I shall find the time pass away quickly enough in the fulfilment of my duties, and I’m sure my duties will be pleasant ones with you, madam,” I said, in the subdued tone and with the suppressed air under which I disguised myself from her, and as I was saying it the door opened and Mr. Malling came into the room.

“You have your new attendant with you, Harty—that’s well,” he began, in a voice that rang falsely in its affectedly cheerful intonation on my ears. “You must get Mrs. Malling to rouse herself and move about a little, and take a greater interest in things here than she has evinced hitherto,” he added, turning sharply to me and scanning me curiously with eyes that seemed to me to be capable of piercing through any disguise. But, to my trembling gratification, I passed through that ordeal safely.

He did not like me, but he did not find me out.

“Put on your hat and go out for a time,” he said to Harty, and though she shrugged her shoulders and tried to evade the order he insisted on its being carried out. I had to get her hat and jacket from a wardrobe and equip her in them regardless of her plaintive remonstrances.

“Stephen, you *know* I can hardly walk a yard,” she said, and he replied—

“Stuff and nonsense, you can if you try—the habit of self-indulgence is strong upon you, and you’re getting yourself into the notion that everything you are asked to do is an exertion.” And with that rough speech he went out of the room and she followed him unwillingly but abjectly.

I saw them cross the flat stiff garden and pass out of sight round the corner of a wood,

and then I reminded myself that the work I had to do must be begun at once. Accordingly I made my way down to the kitchen under pretence of asking for a cup of tea, and while I put a few commonplace questions about the household and its ways I had my eyes about me sharply.

The cook was a fat countrywoman new to the place, averse to the master, and direfully afraid that she would sooner or later be put upon in the matter of work. The kitchenmaid was composed of equal portions of dust, ashes, grease, and stolidity. But the housemaid struck me at once as being both intelligent and evil-minded—she was a cold-looking woman, with pale watery blue eyes, intensely black hair, and a certain stealthiness of demeanour that seemed altogether befitting to Marshlands and my suspicions.

“Your tea would have been taken to you

if you had stayed upstairs—in future you never need come down for it," she said reprovingly. "Mrs. Malling will like you to keep your place in her rooms."

"My lady must be a tyrant, indeed, if I am never to move out of them," I said, lightly; and cook put in defiantly,

"Tisn't *she* that's the tyrant, poor lamb."

"If you try to set new servants against the place by saying things against the master it will be my duty to report you," the black-browed housemaid snapped, and seeing that a regular wrangle had set in I escaped from the kitchen and proceeded to inspect as much of the house as was open to me.

As in the majority of country houses, the sitting-rooms, and they were numerous, were all on the ground floor. Many of the doors stood open, for though it was late autumn and fires were blazing in the grates, the air

was balmy and pleasant. I looked into the dining and drawing-rooms and saw that all the appointments were handsome, massive, and luxurious. Then I walked into the library, which occupied the whole width of one end of the great square mansion, and strove to acquaint myself with Mr. Malling's daily life by making a brief study of the room he habitually occupied.

Newspapers, magazines, and journals of all kinds were scattered about in profusion. The walls were lined completely with a choice selection of books, and there was every imaginable appliance for pursuing the arts of reading and writing comfortably in the apartment.

The only thing that struck me as curious about the room was this—that, occupying such a large section of the house as it did, it should be such a comparatively small room.

“The outside end wall must be enormously thick,” I said to myself, as I recalled the appearance of the exterior, and remembered how far the window, which was in the corner of the room, was from the end of the house outside.

“It can’t be solid brickwork, surely,” I thought; “it’s only old castles that are perched on wind-beaten cliffs up in the north of Scotland that are so extravagantly substantial—there must be a passage or a room behind this wall.”

Fired by this conviction I commenced my investigations along the lines of books as high as I could reach, half hoping to come across some cleverly-concealed knob or spring in the back of one of them. But a noise from the kitchen department startled me, fortunately, and I had only time to get out of the room and turn my steps towards

the stairs before my sister and her husband came in at the front door.

He muttered something to her in a low voice, as I stood aside respectfully for her to pass upstairs, and I saw the colour flush her sensitive face and a gleam of indignation flash at him from her lovely frightened eyes.

As soon as we reached her own room she said to me,

“I will give Mr. Malling’s orders in his own words—no others can suit the folly of them so well. He told me to give you to understand that you are never to come into that part of the house unless you come with a message to me; the fact is he can’t bear anyone to go into the library, he’s so afraid of having his precious books disarranged. I have never dared to take a volume out of its place without his permission.”

“Gentlemen have their fancies very often.

I must try not to offend any of Mr. Malling's," I answered, evading giving a promise not to go near the library, which I should most assuredly have broken on the earliest opportunity. And then I dressed her for dinner and saw her go down to the man who seemed to have married her solely for the purpose of crushing all happiness out of her heart.

Several days passed away, and during them, won, I suppose by the signs of sympathy which I could not always repress, my young mistress grew very confidential with me. She told me of her early home, of her unmarried days, and of her dearly-loved sister Laura, from whom she was separated by her husband's jealously and suspicion.

"He can't bear her," she said; "he dislikes her for herself because she saw through him before he married me, and he hates her

for being a friend to a gentleman who used to care for me when I was a girl ; but though he has parted me from my sister he doesn't try to make up for it to me in any way. I've no other friends, I've no amusement, and he won't let me make a single acquaintance in the neighbourhood—if he finds out that I am fond of you he will send you away."

"Then for your own sake never let him find it out, dearest madam," I cried, animatedly. "Find fault with me, object to my being with you, do anything, in fact, to lead him astray concerning your real feelings towards me. Do anything that will keep me near you."

"How earnest you are about it," she said, kindly. "You have found out that I want a real friend—haven't you ?—and I do, oh ! more than you think. For some reason or other I'm sure it would be a relief to Mr.

Malling if I died. He liked me when he married me, I suppose, but now I seem to be in his way, and my death would suit him."

There were inexpressible sadness and hopelessness in her tones as she said this, and I looked at her with a fresh anxiety. Could it be that her health was being tampered with by the man to whose care her father had confided her so gladly? I tried to banish the suspicion, but it would arise again and again, poisoning my peace and disturbing my rest.

One night after I had seen her settle off calmly to sleep and had heard the rest of the servants go up to their rooms, I crept quietly downstairs with the intention of finding out, if possible, in what way my respected brother-in-law employed those long hours of the night which he was reputed to spend in study.

The way from Harty's suite of rooms to the ground-floor was long, devious, and cold, and as I noiselessly trod it I pictured a few of the results that would accrue if I should be seen or heard. The sense of danger, the dread of detection and failure, roused me both to greater daring and increased caution.

The stillness of death pervaded the upper part of the house. I could hear the beating of my own heart as I descended the stairs and passed across the hall. But when I reached the library another sound fell upon my ears. It was a woman's voice in conversation with my master !

JK

END OF VOL. I.





